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HERMAN • KNICKERBOCKER • VIELE

J-R

1. Fiction, American

To Anna
From Max

September 26, 1911.
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HEARTBREAK - HILL

1. The first part of the paper is devoted to a discussion of the various methods of determining the rate of growth of the economy. The second part is devoted to a discussion of the various methods of determining the rate of growth of the population. The third part is devoted to a discussion of the various methods of determining the rate of growth of the capital stock. The fourth part is devoted to a discussion of the various methods of determining the rate of growth of the labor force. The fifth part is devoted to a discussion of the various methods of determining the rate of growth of the total factor productivity. The sixth part is devoted to a discussion of the various methods of determining the rate of growth of the total factor productivity. The seventh part is devoted to a discussion of the various methods of determining the rate of growth of the total factor productivity. The eighth part is devoted to a discussion of the various methods of determining the rate of growth of the total factor productivity. The ninth part is devoted to a discussion of the various methods of determining the rate of growth of the total factor productivity. The tenth part is devoted to a discussion of the various methods of determining the rate of growth of the total factor productivity.

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HEARTBREAK HILL

A COMEDY ROMANCE

BY
HERMAN KNICKERBOCKER VIELÉ

AUTHOR OF
THE LAST OF THE KNICKERBOCKERS,
THE INN OF THE SILVER MOON, ETC.

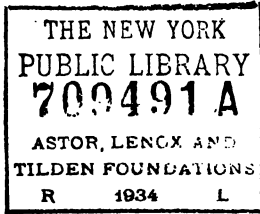
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HEARTBREAK HILL

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HEARTBREAK HILL



CHAPTER I



HE rugged, shaggy little mountain stands by itself without another elevation, high or low, to give it countenance within the limits of the four horizons. Amid the well-kept fields and meadowlands of Beatoun County it seems to rise in futile protest against an established order of perpetual flatness, and in a way there is about it something of the pathos that belongs to resolute minority. It is like an inland island in its isolation; like a meteorite fallen of old time out of space; like

anything suggesting utter loneliness; and, moreover, wisdom has affirmed that Heartbreak Hill has not one blood-relation among the rocks and boulders of a dozen neighbouring counties.

It would be piteous to enlarge upon the strange vicissitudes of Heartbreak Hill during successive ages now happily remote. It has been submerged beneath deep waters; baked by fierce internal fires; ploughed by glaciers. Volcanoes have despitefully used it, and as for earthquakes, their behaviour has been unpardonable.

Mopsie—that is, Miss Mopsie Beatoun—once described the Hill as “an incorrigible amorphous orphan, abandoned to the mercies of a self-satisfied Upper Silurian family.” But this invention, though approximately correct, was intended solely to annoy her cousin Sidney Beatoun and avenge his choice of an inopportune occasion to enlarge her comprehension of the cosmos. To be exact, the moment had been one of the very first of his senior term vacation, and Miss Beatoun, as it happened, had that day put on her first long dress to honour his return.

But Mr. Sidney Beatoun did not see the dress. He took such trivial things for granted, just as he took for granted Mopsie’s hair, which the sun rose earlier in summer to play with, and Mopsie’s eyes and nose and mouth and delicately pointed chin, and Mopsie’s pretty flush of wel-

come, and her even prettier show of interest in whatever interested him. Nobody in the world but Sidney would have expected such a girl to care a ribbon for a bookload of improving facts, and no other girl than Mopsie would have endured them with the same degree of patience.

The Beatouns were such distant cousins that the kinship might well have been a negligible quantity had not an odd joint tenancy of Heartbreak Hill maintained a bond between them—fragile indeed yet too elastic to be easily broken. They were co-partners by inheritance, and co-heirs to an unfailing source of common interest, and this was in itself enough to keep alive the tribal spirit, especially when there were but two surviving tribesmen.

Long, long ago one Jared Beatoun, frontiersman, scout, prospector, pioneer and diligent seeker after trouble generally, acquired Heartbreak from the none too friendly Indians for and in consideration of a jug—a large stone jug—containing either sorghum or New England rum. There is a trifling conflict here between traditions, but all authorities from that day are in accord that for once the simple aborigines had rather the best of a bargain.

Why Jared should have paid so great a price for the chaotic pyramid of worthless rock and unproductive soil remained a mystery at the

opening of the present narrative. Perhaps he was endowed with broader foresight than history gave him credit for. This was Mopsie's theory. She preferred—with little reason—to attribute to her ancestor all the sterling qualities of King Arthur, Charlemagne, and Captain Kidd. Sidney, being more practical, had calculated what the value of the jug and contents might have accomplished at compound interest in a hundred years, and the result was staggering. But this they kept a tribal secret. At all events, the Hill was still a family property and seemed likely to remain so while there were Beatouns left on earth to claim it.

Old Jared at his death bequeathed two undivided halves of Heartbreak to his two sons, each of whom when his turn came passed on the heritage, still undivided, to an only son. It was not worth dividing; it was not worth the cost of a partition suit. Then, following parallel lines of only sons and only sons of only sons without an intervening daughter, the ever separating halves, still undivided, descended finally to the present owners: on the one hand, Sidney, resident of Beatoun's Bridge in Beatoun Township, and on the other Martha—otherwise known as Mopsie—minor, of the place and township aforesaid. All of which is clearly demonstrated and set forth in certain abstracts from the county

records, made and compiled by Colonel Abner Wixom, counsellor at law, self-constituted postmaster of Beatoun's Bridge, and incidentally Mopsie's guardian and great uncle.

"Of course she will have to marry Sidney," declared the little world repeatedly, exercising the unquestioned right of every world to regulate the acts of minors. "She must do so if it were only to keep the Heartbreak woodchucks in the family."

"Indeed, I shall never marry anyone for such a silly reason!" Mopsie would reply, maintaining the inalienable right of every minor to defy the will of legislation.

And it was but natural that her friends should begin to take an interest in Miss Beatoun's future, for Mopsie was an orphan, and moreover she gave promise of becoming before long an exceedingly marriageable orphan, while Sidney had already cast his second annual vote. There was no other fitting mate in sight for either of the cousins. They were in fact so hedged about by arguments in favour of a union that Fate itself seemed daring them to find a crevice for escape. Ever since the summer afternoon when Mopsie—little Mopsie, at the age of ten—appeared so unexpectedly, to become thenceforth a factor in the social system of the Bridge, stockade builders had been busily employed.

But the Beatouns as a tribe possessed that quality of unexpectedness which is apt to keep conventional and rule-bound neighbours in suspense. They had a way of making marriages unblest by logic; of departing without due process of reflection on unreasonable journeys; and of rearing only sons in cities which were much too far away to be desirable. But sooner or later, as if their Hill had been a lodestone mountain to attract them, back they came. Sooner or later there would surely be an echo from the covered span of Beatoun's Bridge to announce for every wanderer some sort of home coming. For though it was a family affectation to despise their worthless heritage, in their inmost hearts they loved it one and all.

To the cousins Heartbreak was a theme for endless discussion, never wholly serious and often verging on the bounds of disagreement, but always fraught with interest. For when they spoke of it the talk was indirectly of themselves; of dim traditions which were theirs in common, and of a dimmer future which they might or might not be foreordained to share. To the rest of the world—or rather to that small portion of the rest of the world which centres intellectually in Beatoun's Bridge—the Hill remained what it had been for generations, a seeding ground for every manner of unprofitable weed, and the im-

pregnable stronghold of marauders; the aforementioned woodchucks, together with equally dishonest squirrels, chipmunks and the like.

In the surrounding commonwealth of thrifty tillage its position was very much that of a village vagabond, content to idle in the sun or shiver in the rain, year in, year out, consuming little and producing nothing. It not only kept down the average yield per acre and kept up the average tax per head, but its presence marred the symmetry of what might have been an almost perfect county map.

The road to Walton, instead of going straight upon its way as good roads should, became divergent when it reached the Hill, hesitated, swerved, and then deliberately divided into two inferior roads, one to the south, a trifle rough and somewhat steep in places; the other to the northward through the woods, low and in rainy weather prone to puddles.

Even Roundabout River, as it swept the rocky base of Heartbreak Hill, forgot a past of rectitude and self-restraint for one hilarious mile of wanton cataracts and questionable eddies, shouted and laughed and danced, and rushed out roaring under Beatoun's Bridge to swagger through the meadows, ever after a chastened, though by no means a repentant, stream.

When Sidney was a very little boy indeed he

made himself believe that Heartbreak was in truth Mount Ararat, and that the covered bridge, steep-roofed and spanning Roundabout like a long red meeting-house, had been left in that position by the receding waters of the flood. He invented for himself a dread that among the heavy axe-hewn timbers of the dim interior, huge, hibernating bears might be still asleep. The Bridge had been in former times a Beatoun enterprise, bringing in rich returns in tolls, especially in the days of the great trek from east to west. Then often in the spring when freshets made the Roundabout a torrent, the lines of loaded waggons stretched out to the crack of doom.

Miss Beatoun built upon her cousin's fiction of the bears a legend that the swallow families in the rafters were descended from a couple, male and female after their kind, who refused to be dislodged when the ark of Noah came to port; and this was the beginning of an endless game of make-believe which in time invested for the cousins every rock and cranny of the mountain with an interest out of all keeping with its simple history. The rugged slopes to him were battle fields and robber haunts; she peopled all the shady flowery parts with subjects of her own, and sometimes there was an argument about the line of demarcation.

"My giants used to sit up there and smoke before you ever saw the Hill," he told her when she claimed a certain briar patch.

"But that was not my fault," she answered, humble, but resolved upon her rights.

When Mopsie's grandfather sold the open-hearted old brick house which, from the former site of Jared's cabin overlooks the valley of the Roundabout for miles, to Abner Wixom, he vowed that he had cut adrift from Heartbreak on his own behalf and that of his descendants for all time. Anyone fool enough to pay the taxes might have his undivided half and welcome, he declared, before setting forth upon an unpremeditated Beatoun journey. But when his son—an only one, of course,—attained an age for folly on his own account his first acts were to pay arrears of taxes, take upon himself the burden that his father had cast off, and fall a willing victim to the undisputed charms of Clara Wixom, Abner's niece.

So they were married, Mopsie's handsome father and Mopsie's pretty mother, boy and girl, when June hung red and yellow roses on the fat white pillars of the porch. And Uncle Abner at the wedding breakfast pledged them whimsically as many rooms in the old house as they or theirs could find a use for. He even hoped—for the occasion warranted a touch of bluff and old-

world humour—that it might be necessary to build a wing.

But the wing was never needed, never built. When the news came back that Mopsie's father had been killed while playing polo, and that Mopsie's mother had resolved to travel, all the rooms on which the Colonel based his genial promise were closed, and so remained until the summer day when Mopsie came herself to claim the smallest.

Even Peleg Prout, who foretold so many things and sorts of things that some of them were certain to come true, had never thought of prophesying Mopsie's advent. She had broken the traditions of her breed in being born a girl, and therefore did not count for anything in any calculation.

Aunt Lydia, Uncle Abner's wife, knew no more of Mopsie than was told in Mopsie's mother's yearly letter, which enclosed a cheque to keep the undivided half from being advertised for taxes.

No doubt at all the cheque was sent in loving memory of one who had so often said:

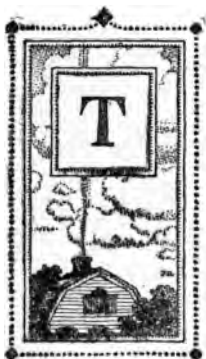
"Let's stick to the old cairn for Mopsie's sake. It's all the poor kid has, and perhaps some day—who knows?"

So Clara stuck to it in spite of many more attractive uses for a young and pretty widow's

moderate income. And so Mopsie, when the spirit of the pioneer impelled her infant and rebellious feet to take the trail, weakest of all intrepid wayfarers, turned naturally to Heartbreak as a refuge in the wilderness.

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CHAPTER II



THE call, so long delayed, on Abner Wixom's wedding breakfast hospitality, came suddenly on that summer afternoon of which a mention has been made. Mrs. Abner, rocking gently within the precincts of her wide cool hall, had closed her eyes to reflect a moment upon a passage in the writings of one Bernard Shaw.

She had chosen her book not for recreation nor in the hope of great enlightenment, but rather from a fixed belief that every woman of intelligence should read every day some printed pages that she could not possibly understand.

Mrs. Wixom's foundations stood in no more need of strengthening than did those of her own four-square Colonial house, well-kept and weather-tight. One felt instinctively in her the psychological equivalent of modern improvements; that her moral chimneys never emitted smoke at the wrong end; that her mental stair-rods must be creditably bright; her innermost

icebox wide open to the world. Though her present attitude of relaxation was one well suited to a lady of her years and merits on a sultry afternoon, it was also true that Mrs. Wixom would have welcomed almost any form of interruption. But the maids were in the garden picking raspberries for jam; the cook was in the kitchen pounding dough; the cat beside the open window lay in wait for flies; the dogs had followed Peleg Prout to Walton; and the Colonel was away from home, attending Court.

"I wonder if they really know what they mean themselves?" the reader sighed, referring in a general way to persons who write books. The cat looked wise and puffed his cheeks.

"It's clear to me"—the creature seemed to say—"that one of us is wasting time."

Mrs. Wixom, turning to her page again, allowed her puzzled eyes to rest a moment on the unfamiliar adjective "anthropometric." The cat, emitting something very like a chuckle, went to sleep. The last fly, seeing that the game of tag was over, floated out into the garden. Then silence fell and Mrs. Wixom dreamed a dream that was not all a dream. She fancied that she heard a hesitating footfall on the gravel path below her open window. And she imagined that she could see approaching through the box and lilac bushes the not unfamiliar figure of a very ragged and ill-

favoured little boy, who carried a tin pail of berries which she did not want but would be obliged to buy because such was the custom of the house. No berry-vendor,—nor anyone else for that matter—peddler, prelate or dancing bear, had ever yet been turned away in disappointment.

The step grew louder, more distinct—the lad had evidently reserved his stoutest courage for the final charge—it is remarkable how much one can divine in semi-conscious moments. From the half-open door a summons sounded which was in part a scratching and in part a knock.

“Come in, little boy! What have you there?” called Mrs. Wixom, shutting up the Revolutionist’s Handbook without a mark to indicate where she should begin again.

“My clothes!” replied an infant voice, and thereupon the door swung open slowly, and the student of psychology sat erect.

“Your what?” she gasped, unable just at first to adjust the focus of her wits. For on the threshold stood no ragged berry-boy, but the daintiest of little beings, exceedingly well-dressed, save that her garments which had once been white were so no longer by reason of much dust.

“Great heavens! Who are you?” exclaimed the lady of the rocking chair.

The being’s large brown eyes were like a



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daintiest of little beings.

puppy's, confident, ingratiating, and ready upon slight encouragement to become exuberant.

"I'm Mopsie Beatoun!" it announced, by no means unconscious of the histrionic value of the situation. "And I have come to live forever with my uncle Abner, if he will have me."

Mrs. Wixom looked at Mopsie with the expression of one who strives in vain to comprehend. Had a polysyllable of Shaw appeared before her with a mass of crumpled golden hair and the most wistful little face that ever needed washing, accompanied by a silver-mounted travelling bag, the apparition would have caused the excellent lady for the moment scarcely more surprise.

"But your mother?"—here the speaker hesitated—"Your mother can't be?—is she—?" Mrs. Wixom's tongue refused to form the inevitable word.

"No," replied the child, "she isn't yet, but she will be Wednesday."

"Will be?" the other gasped, feebly, "will be what?"

"Married!" cried Mopsie, while her full red lips grew straight and set, her small hands closed up into two small fists, and her whole little figure trembled as though some mechanism too potent for so frail a case were at work within her. It was the bitter cry of outraged childhood, realising for the first time that the entire universe was not

created for its comfort; realising that even love is not its own exclusive property.

Mrs. Wixom,—a childless woman, never wholly at her ease with children,—finding herself without a guiding impulse, took a brief deliberative interval to decide how to act, and (being at her best a stupid woman) decided stupidly. She left her chair to fall upon her knees and clasp her arms about the child, not knowing that great sorrow longs ever to look upward and not down.

“You poor dear thing!” she cried in all sincerity. “How could Clara be so selfish?”

Mopsie drew back. She hated to be touched, and she resented the criticism of her mother. Only loving offspring have the right to censure erring parents.

“You are my Aunt Lydia, I suppose?” she said. “You never liked my mamma, did you?”

Aunt Lydia sank back into a Turkish posture upon the hallrug, and Mopsie moved a few steps sidewise to a broad old sofa, where she perched dejectedly. Aunt Lydia smoothed her own smooth front hair with nervous fingers.

“I liked your mother very much,” she protested. “I could have loved her if she had allowed me.”

To this the golden head gave a grave assent.

“Yes, that was mamma’s only fault,” reflected Mopsie. “She would not let people love her.” It was evident that by “people” she meant one

small person, and a very turbulent and rebellious populace it was. "No," she went on, "mamma did not want anybody to love her; except that Honey Pie."

"Who?" cried Mrs. Wixom, gaining her feet with an agile movement she could not possibly have repeated.

In all her fifty years she had never heard of lover so preposterously named. "Who did you say?" she asked again.

Little Miss Beatoun's answer cost her a mighty effort.

"George Reynolds Frothingham," she pronounced, as if each syllable and letter left its separate bitter taste upon her tongue. "But mamma called him 'Honey Pie' " she added. "I couldn't stand it any longer, really."

"I shouldn't think you could," rejoined her aunt with a depth of real conviction, and for the first time there stirred between her and the child that subtle sense of kinship which does away with the necessity of protestations. No doubt she recalled Mopsie's pretty mother in some like moment of revolt, provoked perhaps by Lydia herself; for the memory of a positive misunderstanding may shine brighter through the mist of years than that of many a vague endearment. "Clara never could put up with anything," she said, "and I guess you must be very much the same."

"I hope," retorted Mopsie, "that I have more heart."

Poor Mopsie's little heart was for the moment like a lump of ice; like frozen mercury which so resembles steel, though the warmth of a hand may turn it once again to liquid silver. And soon the melting process was to set in rapidly enough.

"Mopsie," said Mrs. Wixom, with sudden recollection of the perennial attribute of youth, "you must be hungry."

"Oh, no, indeed, Aunt Lydia," was the reply. "I was as hungry as a guinea pig at Walton, but I went to the refreshment room and bought myself three buns, a cream cake, and a great big glass of milk." Miss Beatoun, settling back upon the sofa almost cosily, employed the chubby hands to indicate the greatness and bigness of the glass of milk. "That was the first thing I thought of after I had sent my telegram," she added.

Mrs. Wixom wheeled the rocking-chair about to face her small relative, and sitting down prepared herself for problems scarcely less profound than those of Shaw. For the slightest space of time imaginable the two ideas suggested to her mind by "milk" and "telegram" seemed in a way to threaten a dreaded paradox.

"Telegram?" she repeated.

"Yes," explained Mopsie, more than willing

to begin at once her story, and far more concerned with facts than with the sequence of their presentation. "Telegram to mamma."

"Oh!" Mrs. Wixom assented. "And where on earth is your mamma?"

"Mamma went off this morning," proceeded the child, now fully in the spirit of narrative, "to spend the day with Honey Pie's relations, and sent me to the circus with Annette, our maid, you know. But no sooner had the motor car, which wasn't his but only hired, got round the corner when Annette was taken with the most awful toothache and had to go at once to the dentist's with the grocery man, who's her beau, you see, because he knew a good one who was a friend of his and gave laughing gas for fifty cents, you understand——"

"Stop!" cried Mrs. Wixom, overwhelmed by facts beyond her power of assimilation. "Stop, child, and go back to the telegram."

Mopsie dutifully complied.

"It wasn't a very long one," she said. "Just 'Dear Mamma, I got here safely. Uncle Abner and Aunt Lydia are very glad to see me and want me to stay.' I signed it 'Mopsie Beatoun' out in full so that the telegram girl should be sure who I was."

Aunt Lydia gazed upon her niece in blank amazement, not to say chagrin.

"My dear, of course your despatch is perfectly true," she said in tones of great solemnity, "but how could you have known it would be true at the time?"

So close was her resemblance to a large indignant duck that for a moment she inspired awe; for a moment her small hearer's lower lip hung like a ripe red cherry on the point of falling. Then Mopsie broke out into an honest childish laugh, which echoed up the wide old welcoming stairs and ran along the corridors where all the shut-up rooms stood waiting, and woke the cat, and even moved the pounding cook to mercy toward the prostrate dough.

"Oh, I am telling everything backward!" Mopsie cried, delighted with her own stupidity. "Of course I couldn't have said anything of the sort if Mr. Peleg Prout hadn't told me that you and Uncle Abner would be just tickled to death to have me stay forever. But that would have sounded foolish in a telegram, wouldn't it?"

The puppy eyes had grown so round and wistful that Mrs. Wixom would have stroked the upturned anxious little nose had she been quite sure that such an advance would be well received. Instead, she sat bolt upright in her rocking-chair and asked:

"Child, how in heaven's name did you know Peleg Prout?"

Miss Beatoun's eyebrows came together in a conscientious effort to improve upon her style.

"To begin with," she went on with new deliberation, "the conductor was awfully worried about me being all alone, even when I told him I was Miss Mopsie Beatoun of Beatoun's Bridge, and that I knew exactly where I wanted to go. He was real nice, and looked something like Honey Pie's friend, Mr. Atkinson, who is going to be his best man, only not so fat,—but of course you don't know him. And he had a little girl of his own at home in Welbyville, named Clarine, after her grandmother, who is two years older than me but littler. And so of course when the train stopped at Walton he took out my bag and hollered as loud as he could, 'Is there anybody on the platform from Beatoun's Bridge?' At first nobody answered. Then Peleg Prout hollered back, 'Say, I'm here if I'll do!' And everybody laughed."

Mrs. Wixom breathed a deep sigh of relief.

"That was the first time Peleg was ever known to be where he should have been!" she declared in comment.

"Yes, it was lucky," Mopsie assented with a very serious little nod, and her voice took on a note of *mea culpa* as she added, "Still, Aunt Lydia, do you know I was afraid people would think he was some relation of mine, because he

looked exactly like the pictures of farmers in the comic papers? But I was sorry for being so choosy afterwards when he told me that anybody of my name could have his shirt. Wasn't that funny? And do you know?"—Miss Beatoun giggled cheerfully—"his white mule's name is Rose!"

"So then you came with Peleg on the buckboard?" suggested Aunt Lydia, ignoring White Rose with a view to expedition.

"Not right away," the conscientious chronicler replied. "First we stopped and got the letters, and Peleg told me how Uncle Abner keeps a private postoffice at his own expense, and sends to Walton for everybody's letters every day, because the Government won't let Democrats be postmasters, and Uncle Abner won't let anybody else be appointed——"

"And nobody in Beatoun's Bridge would tolerate such an outrage for a moment," announced the Colonel's wife with becoming spirit.

"I should think not indeed!" Mopsie agreed, loyally partisan at once. "And when I'm big enough I'm going to have a pony of my own and go and fetch the mail myself, and I shall have a dog to sit beside me in the pony cart because, you see, it isn't right for girls—I mean big girls—to be a burden."

"That will be nice!" Mrs. Wixom assented

meekly. She had never known before that infants of such tender years were capable of forethought, and realising then and there how small a part she was to take in mapping out a future for Miss Beatoun, resolved to ask no more of Providence than leave to lend an occasional helping hand.

"I suppose you have heard of your cousin Sidney, child?" she said by way of making a beginning.

"Oh, yes!" said Mopsie. "Often from mamma, and a lot more from Peleg Prout this afternoon. We had a photograph at home of Sidney as a baby with his mouth wide open. I used to think I'd know him if I ever saw him just by that. Wasn't I silly? I'm sorry he is coming back from boarding-school next week because boys have no repose."

The phrase was clearly reminiscent, but not so Miss Beatoun's greeting for the cat who at that moment leaped up beside her to purr forth a cat's unqualified acceptance of her personality.

"Aunt Lydia, did you ever hear why so many cats are grey and striped?" Mopsie asked, and Mrs. Wixom's noncommittal sniff might very well have been interpreted to express desire for enlightenment. "It is to protect them from their enemies," continued Mopsie, "because, you see, cats usually live in basements where the light is

grey, and being striped with black, a dog would hardly notice them behind the area railings. It's just the same with tigers and zebras in the jungle, only different——”

“Who ever put such rubbish into your head?” Aunt Lydia demanded.

“Honey Pie's friend, Mr. Atkinson,” answered Mopsie cheerfully, for she had not expected so profound a thought to find acceptance without due reflection. “He is a very intelligent man,” she added, “and makes up news for newspapers.”

Aunt Lydia's second sniff did not suggest increase of faith in Atkinson.

“As soon as Hannah comes in,” she remarked, “we must see about your room.”

Miss Beatoun had discovered in the cat a willingness to roll over if politely urged, and for a time her interest was divided.

“If you don't mind, Aunt Lydia,” she said at length, “I'd like to have the little corner room that looks across the Roundabout to Heartbreak Hill. I mean the room with Marie Antoinette over the mantelpiece and a picture opposite of people in a boat playing on lutes and things called ‘Summer Days.’ And there used to be two blue china vases on the bureau till my mamma broke one of them throwing pillows at her nurse.”

“Mee—ow!” observed the cat, and darted through the window. Why wear out fur in the

entertainment of a guest already absolutely at home? Presently there came through the still air a rumbling sound like that of very distant thunder, and Mopsie cried:

"Oh, that must be a waggon on the bridge. I know all about everything, you see, and to-morrow I'm going to look on Heartbreak Hill for a turtle with my mother's initials on his stomach."

Pending the appearance of Hannah, the conversation took a wider range, and Mopsie told Aunt Lydia of many happy wanderings with her pretty mother on wild pine-shadowed headlands of the North, or in countries where the moss hung long from cypress boughs above some still lagoon. Like birds the two had migrated with the changing seasons, seeking only sunshine, following the flowers till, as it is with birds, the arrow of the huntsman brought disaster.

And Honey Pie, whatever his demerits, must have been a skilful archer, for it appeared that he had brought down his quarry without a flutter.

"I used to think him awfully nice myself at first," admitted Mopsie, "for he gave me my camera, and a phonograph which mamma would not let me keep because it sung such awful songs, and he made me a present of ten dollars on my last birthday. One for every year, he said,—but of course he had no idea then that I should use it, nearly all, to run away from him."

If Aunt Lydia had been curious to learn how the child had managed to finance her flight, she had so far lacked the moral courage to propound so personal a question. Now it occurred to her that Mopsie ought to be reproved for something, but exactly what that something might be was by no means clear. Perhaps the Colonel would know.

Meanwhile, Mr. Peleg Prout, in his capacity of acting postmaster, distributed the contents of the mailbag to the dozen favoured citizens of Beattoun's Bridge. Beneath the spreading arms of the horse chestnut tree down at the garden's edge, he might have been some venerable Dean in blue jean overalls conferring certificates of merit on a class of sylvan catechumens. The Colonel would have dumped the letters on the large round garden table and allowed each applicant to select his own or hers, but Peleg had a higher standard of official dignity and between letters he relieved his mind.

"What did I tell you?" he demanded. "Don't they all come back? And mark my words, this ain't the last of 'em. There's Sidney going to be home next week, and now here's Mopsie. What more do you want? . . . A postal card for Mrs. Bellanger from her son, saying he's doing well. . . . She's sick abed. Which one of you folks is going to take it over to her?"

CHAPTER III



THE five years following Mopsie's advent found and left the small community of Beattoun's Bridge still pleasantly perplexed concerning the ultimate reunion of the undivided halves. When the cousins quarrelled or made friends again as normal infants should, the knowing said to one another either—"I told you so!" or "Mark my words!"—and then matters stood exactly as before.

Five years brings one to nowhere in particular between childhood and the age of romance; between the last booth of the puppet-fair and the first outskirt of the many-towered town. But there are resting places on the way—playgrounds, rather—where feet disposed to dalliance may linger for another dance to the old music growing fainter. And the fairest of these spots is said to be a certain valley where a brook and river meet.

The river in Mopsie's case was Roundabout, of course; the brook a rivulet which in early

summer makes much ado in scurrying down the sunset slope of Heartbreak Hill; and her by no means reluctant feet were waiting while her Cousin Sidney threw some stepping stones into a marshy place for her convenience.

"If I had known how wet this path would be," he said, testing a doubtful foothold with his own full weight, "I should have taken you the other way." He spoke as one on whom a grave responsibility rests, and Mopsie, laughing, answered that she did not mind.

"It's fun to see you work," she added, gratefully.

"Come on!" he said, and stepped aside, making no effort to assist her in the passage, though a helping hand would have been under the circumstances at least excusable.

"I thought you ought to know the property," he went on, taking up the march a few steps ahead to push aside impeding branches.

"I know most of it pretty well already," Mopsie ventured, "but of course I never came so near the river alone on account of snakes."

Mr. Beatoun kicked an unoffending pebble from the trail and sent it bounding through the underbrush to Roundabout.

"Aunt Lydia must not allow you to go wandering off to lonely places by yourself," he said without a backward glance, though his broad

shoulders squared themselves in disapproval. Six feet in height above his thicksoled shoes, he looked the first of all the Beatouns rather than the last. But if his suit of baggy homespun might have served for the frontiersman's second-best, it was worn in strict conformity with the mandates of his generation, and his straw hat—bent into the most preposterous shape—had probably cost as much money as Jared ever thought of paying for a horse. Nor were these details lost upon his cousin; unimportant in themselves, they helped to make him in her eyes exactly what a Beatoun ought to be, and more than justified his somewhat arrogant assumption of authority.

The path ascended, crossed the river road, and then proceeded in a zigzag course; first twenty yards to the right, then thirty to the left, gaining in elevation rapidly. At the steeper points he extended back to her the crooked end of a long stick he carried as a badge of leadership, and so constituted a sort of towing combination in which Mopsie played the barge and he the tug. This he did instinctively, just as he would have protected her from snakes or hunger or cold or any other physical discomfort. She was not to him that least significant of created things, a half-grown girl, but rather a being whose existence gave him a tribal satisfaction. She reflected credit on the sept of which he was the undisputed

head and overlord. With her welfare ever in his mind he planned to bring back with him to his Meadow Farm some awfully decent chap, still to be selected, from his classmates, on a long vacation visit. But somehow so far when the time arrived the awfully decent chap was not invited.

Ten minutes' strenuous climbing brought the cousins to a broad flat ledge of rock which overlooked the plain toward the west. Far down below them now the Roundabout coquetted in its shadowy gorge; the white road from the bridge took up its maple-shaded mile between the self-respecting, self-sufficing houses that constitute the settlement of Beatoun's Bridge. There were perhaps a dozen of them altogether, strung out at varied intervals from Uncle Abner's blue slate roof to the four fat chimneys of the Meadow Farm at the vista's end. It was not a town in any sense, but merely a thickening in the population of an opulent and productive countryside which would have deserved no name upon the county map but for the ancient bridge built by the Beatouns, sons of ever-glorious Jared.

It is a wonderful fluid, the pride of birth. It has the quality of gaining strength with every fresh dilution. And the two foolish children on their barren hill above the Beatoun fields drew closer to one another; held their young

heads higher side by side, and felt their hearts grow big together beneath the glamour of a time-worn, brave hallucination.

"Mops," he said to her, half in fun but only half, "it's just we two and the rest of them after all."

She nodded, laughing also, though her eyes—no longer puppy eyes—grew soft too, and her face, upturned to his, lost something of its childish beauty in the vague foreshadowing of a greater, radiant and womanly.

"Good little girl!" he said with an all-unconscious patronage which she on her part did not in the least resent, and bending over her planted an approving kiss upon her forehead.

It was a tribal and proprietary salutation, and as such she accepted it, realising only that she had been lifted out of insignificance into something like equality with her masterful relative. A brief experience with her mother and the wily Honey Pie had taught her among other things that there could be degrees and subtle shades in kisses, yet she did not understand why it was that Sidney drew away from her as though the contact of her hair had given him a warning signal, nor why he scarcely met her eyes again that afternoon, although his manner was unusually kind and thoughtful. Never before had he spoken to her

quite so seriously, never appeared to think her small opinions so worthy of consideration.

"I suppose you know this particular rock of old?" he said, as one who manufactures conversation from the best material at hand.

"Oh, yes!" she answered. "This is Heartbreak Rock. I used to climb here often by the other path before my mamma died and watch the Walton road in hopes that she would come."

A little earlier in the day he might have laid a boy's hand upon her head in rough and ready sympathy and told her in a boyish fashion not to mind. But now some strange bewitchment had come over him forbidding him to lift a finger. As might have happened in a fairy story the child had changed into a woman even as she stood passively admitting his prerogative.

Perhaps her absolute unconsciousness had piqued his vanity, though surely he had looked for, wished for nothing else. At all events, in spite of the vast gulf of six whole years between them, he discovered that the patriarchal attitude had suddenly become a shade ridiculous. But when he sat down near her on the ledge, his face turned toward the fields, he found himself discoursing more like an honoured and respected overlord than ever.

"When do you go back to Welbyville?" he asked, alluding to the excellent Young Ladies'

Seminary in which Miss Beatoun had until recently been undergoing education.

"Never, I think," she answered, seriously.

"Why, what's the matter? Don't you like it?"

"Oh, yes, indeed, very much. And I like the teachers and girls, all of them, and I think they liked me, but you see, Sidney——" here Mopsie became still more serious—"I had really finished my education before I went to school, and all I ever needed was to fill in the beginning. Long ago, before I could read to myself, mamma used to read aloud to me her favourite storybooks and poetry, and as I never want to know more than she did and don't mean to like anything she didn't like, it would simply be a waste of time to study little scraps of books I almost know by heart already."

Sidney whistled, nonplussed to discover in this other Beatoun a self-sufficiency which he in his capacity of mentor, guide and master prig had not expected.

"But don't you think that I am right?" she asked.

"Oh, to be sure!" he answered, with a tolerant laugh. "But, Mops, for heaven's sake don't vegetate, don't stop work." He could not help adding the admonition, it was so obviously his duty.

Mopsie crossed her serviceable russet boots before her on the rock and crossed her sunburned

ungloved hands before her on her lap with an air of humble resignation that he found embarrassing.

"Well?" she questioned, meekly, after a momentary pause.

"I was only going to ask what you meant to do," he answered.

She plucked a spear of that mystic weed which not only detects an overweening love of butter but prophesies the social standing of one's matrimonial mate.

"Rich man, poor man, beggarman, thief!"—she murmured to herself, counting the leaves.

"Don't be an idiot!" he said, following the movements of her fingers.

"I suppose horses are awfully expensive," she remarked with no apparent relevance.

"That depends upon how many you want to buy; they are cheaper by the dozen."

Miss Beatoun threw away the weed and turned toward him, resting her weight on one brown hand very near his own.

Their eyes were on a level as he half reclined upon the rock.

"I want a pony very much," she said.

"And you shall have one," he replied without a moment's hesitation, the bestowing instinct for the first time quickening in him the impulse of the dominant male to make provision.

"Not as a present," she protested, flushing slightly.

"Why not?" he demanded.

"Because I have a little money of my own, you know, and want to carry out a plan I made the day I drove to Beatoun's Bridge first with Peleg and White Rose."

For a wonder he found no grave objection to his cousin's journeying to Walton in good weather for the mail, and for a greater wonder he was willing to discuss the details of her plan without a single patriarchal snub. The pony must be sound and kind and not afraid of railway trains. . . . Motor cars were terrors as yet unknown to Beatoun County horses.

"At least I may provide the dog," he said.

"Yes, I should love that," answered Mopsie, simply, for in the social customhouse dogs are admitted duty free. "Perhaps when you come back next fall," she added, "you will find me waiting for you at the station."

"Remember that is a promise, Mops," he said, forgetting that the equipage as she had planned it provided no accommodation for the awfully decent chap.

Then the talk as it was bound to do came back to Heartbreak Hill again, and Sidney told her of a secret robber company of which he had aforetime been the chief.

"We called ourselves the Death Trailers," he explained, "but our only really desperate deed was keeping a small pig in hiding for a week in the Cave of Midas. It was great fun at first to speak of him in a mysterious whisper as The Captive, but when it came to carrying food and water for him up the Hill by moonlight we were soon glad enough to take him back to his pen."

"And what did they do to you?" asked Mopsie eagerly.

"Oh, the farmer, who had a hundred others, never knew that he had been away."

"I think you must have been a horrid boy before I knew you."

"But don't forget I took you fishing with me before you had been here a week."

Mopsie tossed her head.

"Oh, I remember that great afternoon," she answered. "I was allowed to hold the can of bait but not to speak a word because you said my conversation scared the fish."

"But I shouldn't say that now," protested Sidney, not without a touch of gallantry.

"Not oftener than once, indeed!" she retorted, not without a dawning sense of power.

Soon he would be off to join some fellows camping in the northern forests, and Mopsie would take up once more the round of everyday affairs at Beatoun's Bridge. Only the shrinking rem-

nant of an afternoon remained to them, with half of Heartbreak Hill still unexplored.

"I'll show you the Cave, if you like," he said.

She was on her feet in an instant, but he could not understand exactly why she laughed.

In point of fact, she knew the Cave as well as he did and had been there oftener of recent years. There was no cranny of the Hill she did not know. But this she never would have told him when he was in a humour to direct her researches.

"I'll race you up the Hill!" she challenged, and darted on before him like a mountain sheep from rock to rock. Her white dress fluttered in the breeze; her fair hair, loosened from its childish ribbons, blew about her laughing face, and when she perched a moment on some pinnacle she seemed a dryad of the mountain daring him to capture her.

Now she in her turn could not understand exactly why he, instead of following, should stand there looking after her so crossly. She could not guess that he had meant to go ahead and help her, holding her firmly by her little subject hand. How could she possibly have guessed? Should men and women ever reach a plane of perfect mutual understanding life would be simpler, maybe, but not half so full of zest.

"Hold on!" he called after her as she took the trail. "You don't know where to go."

"Oh, don't I though!" she cried and disappeared, but only to spring upon him from ambush as he came up.

"Mopsie," he said when the two stood panting at the entrance to the Cave of Midas, "I have half a mind to cut out that camping trip."

"Why, don't you want to go?" she asked him blankly, and the eyes that met his expressed nothing but surprise. "I wish I had such a chance," she added, "but girls never have any fun."

"I suppose it is too late to back out now," he persisted. "What do you think?" he added, appearing to address his own feet.

"I think," said Mopsie, "that if you don't go you will be sorry."

"And I know if I do go I'll be sorry."

"Why?" asked Mopsie softly, speaking to the toe of her right boot.

"Because," he said, "there are a number of little things I might attend to here."

Mopsie laughed.

"It's a great deal better to go away and miss those little things," she said, "than to stay here and be bored to death by them. Show me the Cave, please."

"Be careful, there are two steps down."

"I know, I know," she said and jumped the two steps, landing firmly on her russet feet.

There was little of the Cave of Midas except the name and two side walls of mossy rock just far enough apart to touch with the extended arms. Roof there was none, except the overhanging boughs of beech trees, thickly interlaced, through which the light fell soft and green. At the farther end, a half dozen paces from the steps, a great boulder, shaken from above perhaps in one of Heartbreak's earlier convulsions, completely filled the chasm. The floor was covered with bits of broken rock reduced to some degree of smoothness, doubtless by the industry of the Death Trailers who had also built a fireplace and kiln for roasting sweet potatoes.

He showed her where the barricade of logs had been drawn across the entrance, and the natural shelf of rock where the band had kept its implements of warfare, and the magazine of round stones to be hurled down in case of an assault.

"Why have you never told me about this before?" she asked.

"Because," he explained, "we were all sworn by awful vows not to betray our meeting place and to hang together through life."

"Boys are beasts!" said Mopsie. "They play such serious games and then forget them."

"No," he said, "the pig broke up the meeting place, but the rest still holds good."

"Really?"

"Yes; why not? a promise is always a promise. But there is very little likelihood of its being tested. The boys are scattered now all over the country, farmers and lawyers and storekeepers and clerks—the most respectable band of robbers you ever heard of. Yet I don't believe that any one of them forgets."

She had taken a seat on the steps, and he stood facing her, his back against the fireplace.

"Where do you think this passage led?" she asked, more to provoke a discussion than from any wish to learn.

"As it's not a passage it couldn't lead anywhere," he said.

"Oh, yes, it is," she insisted, "and I'm sure it led somewhere before that rock behind you fell and blocked the way."

He turned and made a brief inspection of the rock which she from her position could observe much better.

"Impossible!" he declared. "Nobody ever came here but Indians till Jared Beatoun bought the Hill."

"But why not the Indians?" she insisted with a new-found audacity. "And how about the Mound Builders, and the early Spaniards, and the missionaries?"

"And the genii and Sindbad the Sailor?" Sidney added in derision. Then struck by a sudden

recollection, he cried, "Hold on a moment! There should be something here to prove your theory."

From the rubbish on the natural shelf he picked out a fragmentary piece of flint and brought it to her.

"This," he said, "was probably part of a stone tomahawk. We picked it up just inside. Perhaps you imagine that the enlightened individual who once wielded such a weapon required secret caverns to conceal his bonds and jewelry?"

"Oh, you may laugh at me," she said, "but all the same when I get rich I mean to blast that stone away. That is, I'll blast my half of it and then if your half tumbles down it can't be helped."

"All right!" he laughed. "And I intend to get some scientific fellows here some day to look the old Hill over just for curiosity. It's granite all below this broken stuff, and very poor granite at that."

"Sidney," said Mopsie, solemnly, "if you should ever have the Hill—*our* Hill!—looked over by a scientific person just for curiosity, please don't tell me anything about it. I should much rather keep on believing that it is hollow; full of treasure caves and all sorts of lovely mysteries. And I shall never admit that Jared did not know what he was doing when he bought it

at a time when molasses was so expensive and hard to get."

"It was not molasses, it was rum," her cousin contradicted, turning to the alternate tradition for the sake of controversy.

"Well, rum then," she admitted, generously. "Just think of all the afternoon teas he gave up with that jug."

Had the good folk of Beatoun's Bridge seen the cousins rambling down the Hill that evening there must have been a great revival of interest among the warring partisans of "I told you so!" and "Mark my words!"

"Of course Aunt Lydia expects you back to dinner," Mopsie told him as they crossed the covered bridge, stamping their feet to reawaken old familiar echoes.

"I'm glad of that," he answered, laughing, "for otherwise I should have been obliged to come without an invitation."

They stood still a moment looking down at roaring Roundabout, at one pool especially, quite near the shore, where the eddy made a small oasis of calm water in the tumult. Sidney laughed.

"There's where I pitched the boy who put burrs in your hair," he reminded her.

"And I was so afraid you would be hung for killing him," she recalled.

"Pshaw! the water is not three feet deep."

"But how could I know that?"

He had always been the biggest of the big boys, the strongest of the strong ones, and yet the farthest from a bully. His infrequent battles had made epochs in the boy-life of Beatoun County.

At dinner Mopsie might have been advised to pay a trifle more attention to the discourse of her elders and less to the sub-tabulary doings of the cat. But Aunt Lydia did not always see what might have been observed, and Colonel Wixom when he had a guest of his own sex to talk with never noticed anything. As for Sidney, he seemed to have forgotten everything but taxes, elections and fish. He seemed to have forgotten—if he had realised—that this had been the day on which the brook and river met; the day that he had taken her up halfway to the clouds and given her the least effective kiss that ever brushed a maiden's brow. He seemed to have forgotten altogether how very near he had come to not going away at all. And later, when the roses on the porch caught the first glimmer of the round, red moon, above the edge of Heartbreak Hill, he only shook her hand and said:

"Well, good-bye, Mops, I shan't forget the pony—no, I mean the pup."

And before he left the sweet old-fashioned

lane of scented shrubbery he was singing gaily in a youthful baritone that set the Dacer dog across the road to barking:

“Oh, yesterday I had a horse,
A doublet and a dagger, oh!
I sold them for a silver cross,
And gave it to a beggar, oh!”

He checked his song a moment to fumble for the gate latch, and then went on again:

“Ah me, the winter wind is chill,
And every hill-top higher, oh!
The beggarman doth drink his fill
Beside the tavern fire, oh!”

“Good-night all!” he called back through the moonlight, and the Colonel and his wife went indoors. But Mopsie lingered with her head against the fat white post until the Parker dog woke up, and the Dermody dog, a little farther on along the road, and the Van Buskirk dog, and all the other canine tattle-tales who made it known to sleeping Beatoun’s Bridge that Sidney, after dinner at the Colonel’s, had gone home rather earlier than usual.

CHAPTER IV



ARNER WIXOM was not a Colonel in the narrow and technical sense; that is to say, the title had not been won by feats of arms, nor had it come to him through any happy accident of carnage. It was rather a brevet accorded by popular acclaim, and signified no more nor less than the desire of those who knew him best to do him honour. Had warfare never been invented there must still have been Colonels, column leaders so appointed, one for every thousand filesmen; and such there will be when the trade of killing is forgotten, brave men all and gentlemen, good friends and good companions.

It is also in a measure true that Beatoun's Bridge had in conferring the distinction sought to quiet an accusing civic conscience, for Colonel Wixom's abilities deserved, as all men knew, a more tangible recognition. And though his neighbours came to him for counsel in and out of season; threw the burden of their family troubles

on his shoulders; made him arbitrator of their disputes, custodian of their wills, trustee of their estates; yet when primaries and conventions met it was to send lesser men to Congress or to seat inferior lawyers upon the bench—all because the Colonel happened to have been born into the wrong political party and obstinately refused to change.

Abner Wixom clung to an inherited conviction that the course of progress should be shaped a trifle nearer to the rocky limit of our extremely narrow channel, while his neighbours for the most part held a like pre-natal preference for the whirlpool edge. And of course no self-respecting Charybdican may cast his ballot for a Scyllacrat, whatever be his honour for the man in private life.

The Colonel's party was so small, numerically, in Beatoun County, so hopelessly out of the running, that the fact of membership was a proof of either great unselfishness or a quarrelsome disposition.

When the leaders came together in consultation they were commonly as cross as mules about an empty manger or stock-holders confronted by a debit balance, and the postmaster's optimistic utterances fell for the first half hour upon indifferent ears.

One such session was in progress on a pleasant afternoon of that spring that Sidney Beatoun

came back from the Law School to his Meadow Farm, there to lay out for himself a plan of life.

The Colonel as presiding officer was in the Chair; the Chair was in the Colonel's comfortable book-lined study, and the dozen delegates were dispersed about the room, eight conventionally and four upon the broad, low windowseats. The Chairman's excellent cigars were busy in the cause of harmony and goodwill, as was also Peleg Prout, whose duty as Sergeant at Arms consisted chiefly in preventing a large white pitcher from lingering overlong in any given spot. There was an invigorating odour of fresh mint in the air.

"If I may speak——" began a delegate, rising with decorous deliberation to his feet.

"The gentleman from Mumford's Mills!" announced the Chairman quite unnecessarily, for the gentleman was widely known throughout the county both as a prosperous farmer and a constitutional obstructionist. He was a large, mottled gentleman, with a thin, small voice, and eyes of the unblinking fixity observable in sun-fish.

"If I may speak," he said again, "I'd like to preface my remarks by observing that the Governor of this State is no better than a natural-born fool."

"That's right!" assented several delegates in chorus.

"The gentleman will come to order!" said the Chairman, stroking his military moustache which gave his kindly face a most misleading touch of ferocity.

"Well, I've said it!" wheezed the Sunfish, "and I ain't a-going to take it back. What sense is there, I'd like to know, in his calling of an extra session of the legislature right now when folks is busy ploughing corn and haying coming right along? I for one have got no time to fool with politics, which is well enough in the fall,—and neither has anybody else. I say let him have his extra session and be hanged, and pass his nefarious Trolley bills and be hanged. He missed carrying them through in the regular session just because old man Stebbins in this very district up and died, and now he's putting us to a whole lot of trouble and expense so's to get that one Charybdican vote he wants. I say it's foolish if it's nothing worse."

"That's right!" from the chorus.

"Order, gentlemen!" from the Chair.

"And I say," resumed the orator, "that we Scyllacrats had better just keep out of it, for what's the sense of coughing up our money when we all know we haven't got a fighting chance? . . . no, not if we was to nominate the Angel Gabriel himself, and get old Satan to endorse him!"

There was a faint but positive murmur of approval as the gentleman from Mumford's Mills resumed his seat, and his fellow delegates regarded one another in uncomfortable silence till the Chairman spoke again.

"The suggestion has been made," he said, "that we allow this special election to go against us by default." He looked about the meeting, hoping for a sign of fight, of protest even.

"It's bound to go agin us anyway," put in the gentleman from Mumford's Mills.

"There is no motion as yet before the meeting," said the Chairman, while his long fingers dallied with the gavel nervously. It was the old story with his party; nobody aspired to be the leader of a forlorn hope, for there was not a man of them who had not at one time or another known defeat. Still nobody was prepared to take it on himself to make the motion.

"We might as well talk about it a little longer," said the delegate from Walton, whose wife was visiting a married daughter and would not be ready to go home for another hour.

"The gentleman from Walton has the floor."

"I don't want the floor."

"Oh, get up and talk anyhow!" said several other gentlemen at once, and the delegate being thus encouraged, rose, depending largely on the inspiration of the moment.

"Mr. Chairman and fellow members of the county committee," he began after a parliamentary clearing of the throat. "I rise to make a protest against throwing up the sponge before we're beat."

The Chairman nodded his approval of the sentiment; others fixed noncommittal eyes upon the cornice, and from the direction of the Sunfish came the one dissenting grunt.

"I rise to say," went on the speaker, "that the Scyllacratie party is the party of ideas——"

"Where does it keep 'em?" wheezed the Sunfish, reaching for the pitcher.

"Not in Mumford's Mills by a dam site!" was the retort, and this the meeting seemed to think a rather clever bit of repartee.

"I say," went on the delegate from Walton, much encouraged, "and I say it boldly and without fear of contradiction, that our party is to-day confronted by a glorious opportunity—I do not say to win, because we can't do that anyway you figure it out—but to make a better showing at the polls than we've been making lately."

Perhaps the speaker realised his climax to have been a bit lame. Perhaps the inspiration that he hoped for came to him. At all events he dropped his voice into the tone of argument.

"Now just supposing, gentlemen," he said, "I only say supposing, mind you . . . but

supposing we could put up a man who had no corn to plough, nor hay to get in, nor goods to sell, nor law business to attend to——”

“That feller’d be a tramp!” the Sunfish interrupted.

“The man I have in mind is no tramp,” replied the gentleman from Walton, and at the hint that practical suggestions might be forthcoming the delegates displayed some tokens of awakening interest.

“Go on, go on!” they cried.

“All right, I’m going on. . . . Suppose there was a feller in our midst, a young chap, free and pleasant in his manners and known as such all over Beatoun County. And suppose he had the time to give to it and didn’t mind being skinned alive, but would take it goodnaturedly for the sake of the experience and to hold our organisation together; what would you think of giving him the chance?”

“Speaking for my personal self,” put in the Sunfish, “I’d say if you are acquainted with a mutton-head like that, why let him run and be hanged, so long as you don’t ask me to back him for a cent. And I say more——”

“The mill dam’s broke loose again,” remarked a little delegate from Upper Roundabout. “Say, Peleg, ain’t that pitcher actin’ kinder bashful?”

"Order!" said Colonel Wixom, rapping. "The gentleman from Walton has the floor."

The gentleman from Walton squared himself and fell into an impressive attitude.

"Fellow associates," he said, "it's up to us to make a fight. It's up to us to stand by our guns. We've done it often before and we've got licked often before, and this time we're a-goin' to get it good and plenty, same as usual, but I guess when election night comes it 'll find us all alive and kicking—same as usual." (Applause and laughter.) "I therefore beg to nominate for Member of Assembly at the special election to fill the place of old man Stebbins, who is dead, that brilliant young citizen and near kinsman of our honoured Chairman—Mr. Sidney Beatoun of Beatoun."

"Who?" from the Sunfish.

The Colonel half rose to make a protest, but his voice was drowned by handclapping, and for a moment a wave of something very like enthusiasm swept across the meeting.

"Beatoun, Beatoun!" they repeated, some in all seriousness, others with a quiet interchange of winks, but all save one, perhaps, with the intent of paying honour to their Chairman.

"Why, he ain't weaned yet, is he?" wheezed the Sunfish.

"Sidney's twenty-four and looks all of two

years more," replied the nominator, reddening with excitement. "I guess you didn't hear the speech he made at the banquet when we dedicated the hose-carriage last fall. It took the boys right off their feet."

"College piffle!" sneered the Sunfish. "And like enough he got the whole thing out of Ciceros or Gyriscutis or some of them old ancient guys." To make his small opinion of the classic writers mentioned still more evident he washed their very names from off his lips.

"He can't help being a scholar, can he?" asked the gentleman from Walton, "any more'n you can help being what *you* are. And he can't help being a landowner."

"Heartbreak Hill would be enough to sidetrack any candidate," returned the Sunfish, "but I say go ahead. Your candidate is Beatoun already."

He pronounced the surname flatly "Beaten" and chuckled with a great appreciation of his own exquisite wit. The effect was magical. The delegates, aroused to indignation by the ill-timed jest, pressed about their Chairman, shook him by the hand and patted him affectionately upon the shoulder. In their eagerness to show their own good will toward him they made wild predictions, wilder promises. After all, in an off year it might be possible to elect a Scyllacrat.

"But I am not at all sure that Sidney is a Scyllacrat," said the Colonel, laughing.

"Well, he's not against us anyway," insisted Walton.

"My pint is," put in Upper Roundabout, "that so long as he can't be elected his opinions don't cut much ice."

Meanwhile the Sunfish, left to calm reflection and the pitcher, had attained a state of feeling bordering on remorse.

"Gentlemen and friends," he wheezed, "if our honoured Chairman is neighbourly enough to overlook a fool joke I'd like to second that nomination myself."

Applause.

"The candidate was nominated by acclamation half an hour ago," piped Upper Roundabout, and the secretary made haste to write his final entries in the minutes. . . . "Moved, that the thanks of the meeting be extended to Colonel Wixom for his ever-gracious hospitality. Carried amid great applause. Moved, that the thanks of the meeting be extended to the honourable Sergeant at Arms for his unflagging diligence with the pitcher. Carried by a rising vote. Moved, that the meeting stand adjourned, subject to the call of the Chair. Carried."

They passed out through the wide hall in decorous procession, two and two, with the

solemnity of men who have performed a public duty. Exchanging bits of uncouth humour, they climbed into their waiting buggies and went their several ways in haste to make up wasted time.

"It would be all very fine if we only had the votes to back it up," observed Peleg Prout to Colonel Wixom as the two were left together on the lawn. The answer was that votes were bound to follow principles in time.

"But not in time to elect Sidney."

"Oh, dear no. Not so soon as that."

Peleg took off his Sunday coat and laid it tenderly across his arm.

"I hope I'll have a chance to holler once on some election night before I die," he said, and trudged away toward the stables, gloomily.

It was nearly mail-time, the most important time in all the uneventful Beatoun day, and the political meeting would be sure to bring about a full attendance on the Wixom lawn. Under the pretext of expecting letters the good folks of the Bridge would begin to gather before the railway whistle sounded far across the fields from Walton, and they would need no pretext for lingering till early supper time in an interchange of neighbourly half confidences. The mail hour was in truth a humanising social function at which the Colonel took the part of host, moving from group

to group, provided with a supply of well-trying pleasantries and little jokes that were as good as new. Of course the crowning moment came when Mopsie's yellow buckboard roused the ever-willing echoes of the covered bridge, and Mopsie's fat brown pony drew up panting under the horse-chestnut tree, for all the world as though he had not loafed wherever flowers grew along the road in Heartbreak woods. If there were occasional secret mutterings against a system so completely archaic, primitive and out-of-date there were still no critics who would have exchanged it for the best of Rural Free Deliveries.

"Ah, Colonel! Are you not sometimes just a little apprehensive about dear Mopsie?" began the estimable Mrs. Dacer as soon as she had come within conversational distance of the postmaster; and this was but her tactful way of intimating that the mail was late again.

"Not so long as Bill retains a tooth to bite with," answered Mopsie's uncle, laughing.

"Delicious!" murmured Mrs. Dacer, "but as my brother always says——"

Now, Mrs. Dacer had for brother one Frederick Lawlor, who held, as she was ever willing to explain, a proud position in the world of finance, but it is improbable that he had really originated the phrase Better too soon than too late.

"How awfully true that is!" commented her

companion, friend and paying guest, with reverence.

The boarder was a plain young woman with an aggravating little cough which obliged her to sleep of nights on the roof of Mrs. Dacer's front veranda. From a large and varied choice of ailments she was believed to have selected the cough as one that does not mar the appetite.

"Ah, will not dear Mopsie be delighted about her cousin going to the legislature!" went on Mrs. Dacer. "At his age too, just think of it, and without a particle of experience. It's too wonderful for words."

"Sidney will not be elected," said the Colonel, quietly, "the district is too strong on the other side."

The boarder coughed and said it was a shameful state of things, and Mrs. Dacer, quoting her illustrious brother, moved away to spread the intelligence that Sidney would not be elected.

But her news was piper's news. Nobody supposed for a moment that Beatoun of Beatoun would make even a respectable figure at the polls, and it was agreed a pity to sacrifice the boy. Otherwise, the nomination might be passed over as a joke; one of the foolish jokes the Scyllacrats were continually perpetrating.

"It is really most pathetic," said Mrs. Dacer. "I saw him galloping toward Walton, just to

meet her on the road,—to tell her all about it, I suppose.”

“Yes,” said the boarder, “but he’ll miss her. For he took the Hill road and he should have known that Mopsie always takes the river way when the arbutus is out.”

CHAPTER V



EANWHILE the Beatoun carrier, finding the shade of Heart-break woods a pleasant variation from the sunbaked Walton pike, allowed her pony to drop into his favourite pace, a jog-trot of his own invention which was in truth no faster than a walk.

She herself loved the long green lonely alleys, and confidently believed that Pierrot loved them quite as well, and as for Bill, he never made the slightest effort to disguise his preferences. There was no atom of dissimulation between his brindled sides, neither behind the right eye which was brown, nor behind the left eye which was pink. At the first shadow of the overhanging trees he shrieked aloud for liberty to run ahead and warn all outlaws, furred or feathered, that the United States mail must under no circumstances whatever be delayed.

When Bill had hurled himself to earth the carrier leant back against her buckboard's none

too yielding cushions, apparently oblivious of responsibility. A clean fresh smell of mould and moss came down from squirrel-haunted slopes and cool ravines, and up from Roundabout a scent of aromatic shrubs and reeds and waterplants. Mopsie turned her head from side to side to catch new breaths of fragrance every moment.

Behind the leaves industrious birds kept up a constant going, and chipmunks everywhere had business calling for immediate attention. But Mopsie—reading no lesson in the universal diligence—removed her hat and laughed at Bill for taking life so strenuously. She laughed because it was good fun to be a mail-carrier, fun to be out of doors, and the best of jokes to be alive. A breeze swept back her hair and held it so until a sunbeam kissed her forehead all in fun, and when in fun a black-bird challenged her to whistle there was not much to choose between the rival melodies.

Bill as usual barked continually, pretending to discover hidden enemies in every shadow. He leaped the low stone wall to bark, and ran down the bank to Roundabout to bark again, but at the spring where Mopsie made a customary halt his barking went beyond all reasonable limits.

As she stood on tiptoe to uncheck her pony by the old moss-covered trough she made a pleasant

little picture, even if the subject was a trifle out of date and destined soon to be archaic. Small doubt the eternal maid will go on making pretty wayside pictures whether her progress be on hoofs or wheels or wings; and prove in no degree less charming with a whiff of gasoline about her than when she smelt a little bit of horse—only it will be different.

As Pierrot drank Mopsie splashed handfuls of cold water toward the ever valiant Bill and told him to be quiet.

“Boof! boof! boof!” retorted Bill, doing his level best to say: “Because a fellow barks a bit in fun occasionally you mustn’t think he can’t be serious. Boof! Kindly follow the direction of my nose. Boof! Yes, right there on that stone. What do you think of that?”

Mopsie stepped back from the pony’s head with a little cry more of surprise than of alarm. It was unusual to see anybody in Heartbreak woods, even a gnome, and the figure that now met her astonished eyes could scarcely have been anything more formidable. It was the figure of an odd little man who sat perched upon a boulder. He held a large and reassuring sandwich in both hands, and the eyes that blinked above it from a wrinkled, sunburned little face were by no means threatening. He might have been of any age from five and forty up, and certain pe-

cularities of attire suggested foreign origin, but had Mopsie been familiar with such matters she would not have mistaken the tin cylinder suspended from his shoulder for a musical instrument.

"Don't be afraid," she said. "He never bites unless I give him permission."

"Thank you," replied the little person with as much of an alien accent as it is possible to put into two words so easily spoken.

"What are you doing here?" she asked, becoming bolder as the realisation of his smallness dawned upon her.

"Boof!" put in Bill as who should echo, "Yes, that's the point, my good fellow. Out with it now and quickly too. What *are* you doing here?"

Bill was well aware that an undivided half of the boulder came within his bailiwick, but he was far too courteous a dog to take unfair advantage of the stranger as he slid to earth.

"I make the nature study," said the little man, removing a little cap which now appeared to have covered another tightly fitting one of fur. His hair was very thick and very brown and stood erect upon his head, and his eyebrows would have taken the prize in any caterpillar show. He seemed most anxious to be communicative though hampered by a lack of words.

"Perhaps, sir, you speak French," suggested

Mopsie, willing to display her one polite accomplishment, and vanity promptly and properly met with its deserts.

The little man had such a reserve of unspoken French within him that he must inevitably have burst asunder from internal pressure had Miss Beatoun's appearance been long delayed. The language simply rippled from him freely as water from the mountain streamlet which supplied the trough, and seemingly with as little interruption. At first his hearer's unaccustomed ear caught nothing but the rhythmic flow of syllables. Then gradually the more familiar words began to separate themselves and she gathered now and then a faint impression of his meaning. He was a naturalist, a seeker after herbs and roots. The exhibition of the contents of his cylinder made this unmistakable. From these he manufactured and distilled an elixir which produced surprising effects upon the human hair. Mopsie smiled and nodded and said yes or no whenever he appeared to expect an answer. Sometimes she feared that he was asking for information, but as he did not even seem to be greatly disappointed when she shook her head she did not try to understand. He had been in several places and was on his way to several others, but they were all either towns of which she had never heard or else he mispro-

nounced their names abominably. On the whole she was mortified to find her supposed accomplishment of the class room of so little use, but with the mail already twenty minutes late there was no time then for further practice.

He made a charming little bow at parting, thanked her for she did not know exactly what, and trudged away toward Walton at a surprising speed. And from all the multitude of words she had really learned no single fact, which was unfortunate, because a stranger in the neighbourhood of Beatoun's Bridge—at least a stranger who was not a tramp—was sure to be an object of great interest.

It was a point of honour among the patrons of the Colonel's post office to make the most of Mopsie's arrival, and never did her yellow buck-board turn into the gate without a chorus of exaggerated felicitation. This was part of the joke, part of the atmosphere that surrounded the old house and its master, a little bit unreal, perhaps, but pleasant and refreshing. The Colonel hated platitude as thoroughly as Mrs. Wixom dreaded paradox, and the two between them kept what might have been a very dull and stagnant small community in social health. There was always something doing at the post office, never very much, but enough to repay one for the trouble of dressing up and polishing one's wits.

Sidney's nomination was of course the news to be told Mopsie as the Colonel unfastened the official straps and buckles of the mail-bag. Her uncle was surprised that she had not heard the story from the young man himself.

"I must have crossed him on the way," Mopsie explained, "for I met only a very odd little stranger on the river road."

She described the naturalist, and Beatoun's Bridge was interested.

"I shall bolt every one of my windows myself to-night," declared Mrs. Dacer, and the boarder with a cough exclaimed:

"And you won't catch me sleeping on that roof again in a hurry, even if he should turn out to be nothing but a harmless maniac."

Others according to their gift of apprehension, suggested chicken stealing, clothes line robbery, dog poisoning, arson, murder, and rapine, but it was agreed that it would be well to allow the Beatoun watch dogs full sway for a night or two.

"Oh, say!" contributed the big Van Buskirk boy who had a weakness for forbidden rabbits, "I seen that little cuss a-climbin' Heartbreak this morning about dawn, but I took him to be just some tom-fool artist with his painting outfit."

"He must be wrong in the head for sure," said

Peleg Prout. Certainly no one in full enjoyment of his faculties could choose to pass an entire day on Heartbreak Hill. There were no two opinions on that score, for there was nothing about the Hill to attract a stranger, nothing to repay investigation.

"But there are herbs there," maintained Mopsie, humbly.

"If he was hunting on them bare rocks for something to make hair grow he must be a homeopathist," observed Peleg Prout; and as no jest at the expense of the Beatoun heritage ever failed to win approval, the discussion ended rather cheerfully.

Meanwhile the mail-bag being duly opened, the Colonel proceeded in effect to shake it by the heels above the garden table, upon which there fell a shower of assorted papers, packages and letters.

"Come, all of you, pitch in and help yourselves!" he called out in the cordial tone of a host who modestly makes little of his feast, and at once there followed a good-natured scramble. Even those who entertained no hope nor wish for letters pressed about the table, grasping at whatever object in the grab-bag aroused their curiosity, while the Colonel's only office seemed to be that of umpire determined on fairplay. The talk was animated and incessant.

"Miss Grace, this here must be from your sister. Soon as you open it, tell me how the boys is."

"Eben, I guess that's your son's handwriting."

"Miss Parker, here's a postal card from Mary; she's goin' to move. I couldn't help readin' it, bein' upside down."

The more enlightened patrons expressed themselves less unreservedly.

"I'm sure I never expect to get a letter," confessed the boarder with a cough. Nevertheless she resolutely held her ground upon the firing line.

"Nor I," said Mrs. Dacer, wedging herself towards the front, "unless that great big brother of mine should condescend to indite me an epistle."—No relative of Mrs. Dacer would ever do so commonplace a thing as write a letter.—"But Frederick is, to say the least, an intermittent correspondent," she went on to say, omitting to add that brother Frederick's current intermission had endured already seven years.

Partly to insure himself against disappointment and partly to magnify the importance of Beatoun's Bridge, Mr. Peleg Prout was wont to send for catalogues and circulars of almost every commodity that may be advertised, from garden seeds to artificial limbs. This mass of useless matter made a sort of placer bank in which to

delve for nuggets, and so prolonged the general interest, but with the best intentions the distribution could not be stretched beyond ten minutes.

"Nothing from my brother Frederick," murmured Mrs. Dacer with a little sigh of resignation as she moved away.

"But the papers keep one so well informed of the health of really prominent men," the boarder ventured, hoping to have said something rather neat. In this she had obviously failed, as her friend and patron stiffened.

"My brother's name is rarely mentioned in the public press," the great man's sister said. "He prefers always to remain incog—'The Man behind the Throne,' as one might say. They call him in the inner circles Foxy Lawlor, I believe. It's too amusing."

The boarder, who was of a gentle and ancillary nature, giggled, and, giggling, coughed. When her larynx was once more in working order she exclaimed:

"Oh, wouldn't it be fine if Mr. Lawlor were to pay you a visit?"

"My brother is accustomed to every luxury that life affords," retorted Mrs. Dacer.

"But for that very reason, mightn't he enjoy the novelty of being for a while just one of us?"

"That would be a novelty indeed to Frederick." Mrs. Dacer's tone betrayed her difficulty

in picturing the mighty man as one with anything so unimportant as the boarder, and placed the discussion far beyond the radius of rejoinder.

But the Colonel's post office had at least one patron who was never in a hurry; who displayed no curiosity concerning other people's letters and no impatience for her own, and this was Madame Triboulet, the sole exotic resident of Beatoun's Bridge. She was content to sit in calm composure on a garden seat until the table was deserted before approaching to examine with a casual interest whatever missives might remain unclaimed. Two blue envelopes had been her portion every month of the six she had passed as a member of Mrs. Dacer's paying household, and these had appeared with the regularity of zodiacal signs. But none but herself and Mopsie had the slightest inkling of what the blue envelopes might contain.

To-day her usual letter had arrived, and Mopsie, tripping across the grass toward the seat among the lilac bushes, held it up laughing.

The Frenchwoman gave a little birdlike start, accompanied by a chirp of pleasure. Not because of the letter, no indeed, but because Miss Beatoun had been so gracious, so considerate. Had Mopsie's expedition been agreeable? Had she met with no wild animals in the forest? no ser-

pents? No? Ah, that was fortunate! Everything was fortunate, everything charming.

Assuredly, Madame herself was charming against the lilac leaves in her toilet for the afternoon. Had she been cast upon a desert island with no other salvage than a wardrobe and a looking glass she would still have made a toilet every day at five o'clock. When after weary years the rescuers arrived, she would have met them in a gown of plantain leaves, relieved with fish scales here and there, and something in the way of feathers. Even without the resources of a desert island she contrived to breathe in Beatoun's Bridge an atmosphere of Paris, and retrim her five and thirty years as skilfully as she did her last year's gown.

Before the afternoon was over the Colonel would join her for an interchange of harmless international gallantries, she in her slightly fractured English, and he in his ridiculously imperfect French. He was so droll, this Colonel, so distinguished! and before taking her departure she would pay a formal little visit to the Colonel's lady, and make certain that no lady in the garden was omitted from her diligent inquiries. Most of the gentlemen of Beatoun's Bridge avoided her because her foreign manners disconcerted them. Though not sufficiently goodlooking to be dreaded by the prudent, her

sidelong glances seemed to bring out defects. Beneath their scrutiny shoes lost their polish, neckties worked awry, and spots appeared spontaneously on the human coat. As for Peleg Prout, the sight of her parasol in the distance was enough to send that bashful patriot to the furthest corner of a ten-acre lot.

"Come and look at the watermelons," suggested Mopsie, knowing that Madame desired above all things to tear open her envelope. She could also have foretold its contents to a certainty.

Madame in searching for the secret of eternal youth had found it in the wellspring of perpetual hope.

"Hope is the elixir of life," she had said to Mopsie. "Without its strengthening power, my child, we die. You have everything to look forward to; I, nothing but my fairy fortune. That I may spend in my imagination every night. Two hundred thousand francs! I squander it, I economise it, I waste it, I hoard it, but it is mine to do with as I please. Who shall tell me that that is not worth two dollars every month?"

"Oh, yes, of course," Mopsie assented, rather doubtfully, "but . . ."

"But I may never win the prize, you mean?" broke in the Frenchwoman. "Bah! My little Mopsie, that is not the point. It is also possible

that you may not marry the handsomest, most adorable man alive . . . but of course you will. Now let us see!"

There was nothing in the blue envelope more important than a printed list of winning numbers in an illicit lottery enterprise, conducted somewhere in the Southern hemisphere. Madame scanned the numbers eagerly, gave a tragic little sigh, and tore the paper into fragments.

"My faith!" she cried. "I must quickly send two dollars to renew my expectations for another month."

Mopsie, laughing, patted her friend's mitted hand by way of consolation.

"I am absolutely sure you will get your prize some day," she prophesied.

"Sure Mike!" assented Madame Triboulet, who kept a private stock of idioms for Mopsie's delectation. "Now let us forget this folly while we walk, and you shall tell me why your cousin wishes to become a deputy."

"Oh, don't ask me," retorted Mopsie, flushing. "I never heard of it till a few minutes ago . . . I'm not at all in Sidney's confidence."

They were in the kitchen garden with vegetables on either side ranged in neat rows, much like printed columns composed entirely of question marks and exclamation points, when from familiar sounds proceeding from the covered

bridge they knew that a horseman was approaching the old house at a gallop. But Mopsie, taking Madame's arm, moved swiftly down the long garden path.

"Let us go on to the melon beds," she said. "These beets and carrots are so frightfully self-righteous."

CHAPTER VI



ELEG!" cried Mopsie, coming to a breathless halt after her short run from the side gate of the Homestead Place to Peleg's residence, a two-roomed building near the covered bridge which had been in olden time a toll-house. "Peleg," she repeated, "are you working?"

Peleg shook his head, and as he had been seated on his doorstep in full view of all mankind for half the afternoon, both question and gesture might have seemed unnecessary. But usage called for the formality. It was often Peleg's pleasure to perform the hardest sort of manual labour for his friends and patrons of the Wixom household,—“just as an accommodation,” so he said. And as often when apparently unemployed his time was being charged against the Colonel at an hourly rate. This system had the double merit of preserving Peleg in his own opinion from the taint of menial dependence, and giving his employer in the long run much more service than was ever paid for in debasing

cash. "It was him that made me the man I am to-day," the retainer often said with lowly pride. And by this he meant that of old the Colonel had dissuaded him from whiskey, which friendly demon in its turn had dissuaded him from perpetual bondage to a widow with a farm. So all things had worked for good with Peleg Prout, who (calling himself a veterinary surgeon and agent for agricultural machinery) still found time to take good care of Mopsie's pony and keep the garden beds in marvellous order.

Peleg, theoretically at work, brooked no interference with his plans; supposedly idle, he took all suggestions put to him with tact most amiably.

"I was only going to ask—" continued Mopsie, and looking up at her he perceived at once that whatever she was about to say must be amusing, interesting and of the greatest moment, "—I was only going to ask if it would not be a good idea—a splendid, grand idea—to build on top of Heartbreak Hill . . ." She made a pause, and Peleg, as his ears could not turn forward, opened wide his mouth to hear. "To build," she said again, clasping her hands beneath her chin, "on Heartbreak Hill, right on the very highest point, the biggest—largest—BONFIRE! that was ever built."

"Snakes!" roared Peleg, springing to his feet.

"What for? You ain't foolin', are you? . . . You don't mean to tell me, do you, that Sidney's gone—and—got—*elected!*"

"Indeed he has!" cried Mopsie, experiencing a slight return of dignity now that the mighty news was out. "Uncle Abner has just heard all about it on the 'phone. Mumford's Mills was the last place in doubt, and that we have carried by seventy-three."

"Well, I'll be damned!" commented Peleg Prout, depending somewhat on the Recording Angel's known readiness to make allowances. "And here I've been sittin' all the afternoon a-callin' fellers liars that drove by!"

There seemed to be no one explicit reason why Beatoun of Beatoun should have triumphed. Perhaps it was in part a tribute to the Colonel. Perhaps the Death Trailers, working early and late, had accomplished it. Perhaps Mopsie had helped a little, visiting with tribal fealty all farmhouses within reach of Pierrot's stubby legs. Perhaps the explanation was that every man in Beatoun County, farmer, or factory hand, who had fished or hunted or played ball with the candidate or swapped yarns with him by the roadside, had thought of some sufficient reason to forsake party' affiliations in his favour. At all events, he was elected to the legislature, and Peleg promised Mopsie that there should be a

monumental fire if it cost the last dry stick on Heartbreak Hill.

This was Mopsie's way of spreading the good news. Nothing had been known at mail-time when the big Van Buskirk boy had taken her place as carrier through fear of holiday excitement in Walton streets. And nothing would be known officially till morning, for the Colonel's messages had come to him by telephone directly from the Scyllacrat headquarters.

As Mopsie went back in the fading twilight the settlement seemed even quieter than usual. She would have liked to slip in for a word of confidence with Madame Triboulet, but the Frenchwoman's support had been during the campaign to say the least lukewarm. In her opinion—always guardedly expressed—no young gentleman of prudence should seek to become what she was pleased to call "a deputy" before he was established in the world, and had amassed a fortune all-sufficient for his needs and the needs of those who were or were to be dependent on him.

"It is not wise," she said, "to build first the house and afterwards the cellar." And thereupon there had fallen a slight coolness between Miss Beatoun and her most congenial friend.

Colonel and Mrs. Wixom sat on their front porch, planning changes in the shrubbery. The

forsythia was crowding the syringa in a certain clump. Nothing further was said of the election just then, probably because Aunt Lydia firmly believed Sidney to have been chosen weeks before in her husband's study, and could not understand nor be made to understand why after that men took the trouble to vote. In the intervals of silence Uncle Abner smoked and stroked Mopsie's head as she sat below him on the steps.

"Why, here comes Mrs. Dacer and that boarder with a cough!" announced Mrs. Wixom, peering into the twilight where her far-seeing eyes discerned two figures moving silently from across the road; and still more silently the Colonel rose and disappeared into the house. "I suppose they are coming over for a game of cards," she went on, to which Mopsie answered with a muttered word that sounded very like "Bother!"

"We thought you might feel disposed to a little relaxation after all the strain," began Mrs. Dacer, who had evidently put on her best deportment with her best shirtwaist, and Mopsie, perceiving cards to be inevitable, cut short the usual preliminary skirmish by proposing them herself.

"If it is your pleasure, Mrs. Wixom," assented Mrs. Dacer, graciously. "My brother often says 'A clean hearth and the rigour of the game.'"

The boarder coughed a deep sepulchral cough.

"Do come in out of the night air," entreated Mrs. Wixom with her wonted tact.

"Shall it be Mountain Whist?" inquired Mrs. Dacer, and as this was the one game that Mrs. Dacer's conscience permitted her to play it was unanimously decided that it should be Mountain Whist.

It was the boarder who had introduced the game, which seemed remarkably like the elder whist except that each technical term had been changed to something else, which produced at times a slight confusion.

"I must tell you that I was wrong the other evening," said the boarder as the four ladies crossed the wide hall. "I remembered afterward that the aces take everything, even kings, because they are the constables."

"I don't see why they shouldn't do so just because they are aces," rejoined Mrs. Wixom.

"But that would be like ordinary whist, wouldn't it?" the boarder asked.

"I'd call it Mountain Mist instead of Whist!" sniffed Mrs. Wixom, fondly believing she had made a joke.

A bright lamp in the great square sitting-room illuminated fittingly its wealth of stately old-time furniture, and made the shadowy corners radiant with glint of polished brassware and

prismatic glass. One dropping into any of the chairs at random experienced the delight of having drawn a prize, and willing little tables seemed to spring up everywhere of their own accord. It was essentially a Beatoun room, and, saving only that the Beatouns who had once adorned the walls were now replaced by equally imposing Wixoms, Miss Beatoun might as well as not have been her own great-grandmother.

It was Mopsie who cleared the table and arranged the chairs, and Mopsie who sat down last with her face toward the open door in the vague hope of couriers or telegrams or some continuation of the delightful agitations of the past campaign. To tell the truth, she would have much preferred the bonfire to Mountain Whist, and the reflection that no girls ever, under any circumstances, have any fun at all, brought with it very little consolation.

They cut for the deal and Mopsie drew the Shepherd King, who bore a close resemblance to the royal profligate of hearts; her aunt disclosed the Three of Goats; Mrs. Dacer a Knave of Foxes, and the boarder something in the line of Wolves, for Mountain Whist is nothing if not pastoral.

"Well, whose deal is it?" demanded Mrs. Wixom of the company in general, but unfortunately nobody was at all sure.

"Why shouldn't it be my Shepherd King?" inquired Mopsie.

"Because," explained the boarder with a cough, "the Knave of Foxes always takes a Sheep unless a Constable is present."

"But you never told us that before!" objected Mrs. Wixom.

"I had forgotten it," confessed the boarder, frankly.

"Let's cut again," suggested Mopsie. "Next time it may come out simpler."

"No," replied the boarder, "I am absolutely certain now that the Three of Goats has precedence."

"Why?" demanded Mrs. Wixom.

"Because," was the conclusive answer, "that is the rule." And after this the game went on without further interruption for the space of several minutes.

"I wonder who that strange man could have been who drove toward the Meadow Farm just as we crossed the road?" the boarder speculated, as she led a timid Sheep which one of Mrs. Wixom's Wolves was quick to pounce upon. Mopsie revoked, partly by reason of her interest in the stranger and partly because she always preferred to keep the King of Sheep until that potentate was certain to be captured, on account of his fancied likeness to Honey Pie. The

boarder as she gathered in the trick announced a rule to justify the act.

"Whoever he was," observed Mrs. Dacer, "he nearly ran us down. For a moment my heart stood still."

The boarder cast a simpering glance at Mopsie. It was evident that interest in the game would presently begin to flag.

"Speaking of hearts—" she said. "Ahem!"

"Sheep, you mean," corrected Mopsie, playing out of turn.

"No," maintained the boarder, stoutly, "I mean hearts, real hearts—but then perhaps I shan't say what I was going to."

"Game for our side, isn't it?" asked Mrs. Dacer, preparing to get busy with a pencil and a pad of paper.

"Let's count it anyway," suggested Mrs. Wixom, gathering up the cards and shoving them to the boarder on her right. "What were you going to say?"

"Oh, I've forgotten," replied the other, slyly, as she shuffled. "I guess," she added, "some of us are mighty happy over the election."

"The only difference it made to me," said Mopsie, "is that I couldn't go to Walton for the mail this afternoon because I am a girl. But next year when you have the Rural Free De-

livery it will serve you right if you never get your letters."

The boarder coughed a deep lugubrious cough.

"Next year!" she echoed dismally, but brightened in a moment to observe: "We couldn't hope to have an attractive young lady carrying our mail always."

The boarder, who appeared to cherish a belief that attractive young ladies relished being "teased," might have continued in her playful vein had not Mrs. Wixom interposed.

"Goats!" cried the hostess. "I make it goats."

"Now, if I were some folks——" began the boarder afresh.

"Goats!" insisted Mrs. Wixom. "Mopsie, please play."

Mopsie played and Mrs. Dacer followed suit, but unhappily with such force that her card fell into her partner's lap, from which it naturally slipped downward to the floor.

"I'll get it," Mopsie volunteered, and descended beneath the table amid a pushing back of chairs and drawing aside of skirts which might have sent a card in any one of three directions.

"Come on! Let's play without it," suggested Mrs. Wixom.

"We couldn't," rejoined Mopsie, now on her hands and knees. "And besides I want to find out what it is. Don't you remember the gipsy fortune-teller said:

'What falls to the floor
Will come to the door.'"

Just as her head went out of sight the other ladies gave a start in unison, and, suddenly conscious of an alien presence, turned with one accord toward the place foretold in prophecy.

"The Knave of Wolves!" announced Miss Beatoun from the shadow, quite unaware of anything unusual above board.

"Heavens!" gasped the boarder. "Hush!"

The Knave—if such indeed he were—appeared to be a gentleman of thirty years or thereabout, holding in his hand a funny green felt hat enlivened by a tightly curled feather at the back. It was such a hat as gentlemen of cheerful taste in dress affected at that time, though strange in form and hue to Beatoun's Bridge.

"I beg your pardon!" began the Knave with perfect self-possession, "but I have been knocking for half an hour, and as the door was open——"

He said no more in words, but his amiable moustache seemed to add:

"Fair ladies, here I am."

"Whom did you wish to see?" demanded Mrs. Wixom icily. The boarder simpered and restrained a cough, and Mrs. Dacer administered to Mopsie underneath the table a considerate kick.

"I am looking for Miss Beatoun," said the stranger, and producing from his pocket a torn envelope he became even more explicit. . . . "Miss Mopsie Beatoun . . ." he appeared to read, and cast a glance of inquiry toward each of the company in turn.

"Miss Beatoun is not—ahem!—not visible just now," Aunt Lydia was beginning, when Mopsie, overcome by curiosity, thrust out her head.

"I am Miss Beatoun," she announced, and the next instant would have given much to be again in obscurity with Mrs. Dacer's foot. She had expected to encounter some rural runner from the seat of war, or one of Peleg's minions in quest of kerosene; in fact almost any sort of apparition other than the Knave of Wolves. As for that young gentleman, his true feelings will never be known. In later days he was wont to liken his first impression of Miss Beatoun to that of some fortunate Attic rustic who had chanced to be on hand when the Queen of Beauty rose resplendent from the sea. But that was after he had given much thought to the matter.

"Get up!" commanded Mrs. Wixom in a whisper.

"Aunt Lydia," protested Mopsie, "I refuse to creep, and besides your chair is on my dress. Won't anybody please pull back the table?"

"Permit me," said the stranger, promptly entering on his task without the least embarrassment. His grasp was firm, and his feet—small and neatly shod, as Mopsie had the best of opportunities for observing—appeared specially trained to avoid stepping upon kneeling ladies.

"My name is Stites," he said, and it occurred to Mopsie that Mr. Stites desired to have the worst about him known at once and over with. Upon her feet, she noticed that his eyes were bright and twinkling like the eyes of chipmunks, and that his small neat head suggested in a way some wholesome sort of nut. She also recognised that Mr. Stites, in spite of eccentricities of dress, was not what Sidney would have called a "mucker."

"I am Miss Beatoun," she repeated, as though no painful and distressing incident had intervened.

"Won't you sit down, sir?" put in Mrs. Wixom, graciously, and the two other ladies, realising suddenly the lateness of the hour, rose and beat a rather bad retreat.

"Good-night, sir," said the boarder with a

cough, and Mrs. Dacer murmured hurried words to the effect that meeting Mr. Stites had been to her a source of pleasure.

"If you must be off," observed the hostess, "I will see you to the door."

Alone with Mr. Stites, Miss Beatoun sank into the corner of a sofa while he selected for himself an upright chair and placed it facing her.

"I'm awfully sorry that I broke up the card party," he began, "but my errand is a business one, and I must catch the train at Walton at eleven-something."

Mopsie bowed and cocked her head into an attitude of polite attention. If she could have spoken freely to the Knave she would have entreated him to lose no time in making known his business.

"If I am not misinformed," he went on with much too great deliberation, "you are, Miss Beatoun, interested as an owner in the property known hereabouts as Heartbreak Hill."

"I am only a half owner," she answered. "An undivided half owner. I mean to say, the owner of an undivided half; the other undivided half belongs to——"

"To Mr. Sidney Beatoun, does it not?" interposed Mr. Stites with an ingratiating smile. "The gentleman who ran for the legislature——"

"And was elected," Mopsie added, somewhat vauntingly.

"Of course," assented Mr. Stites. "One would scarcely think of doing business with a defeated candidate on election night."

"But if you want to see my cousin——"

"He won't be back till midnight? So I understand, and that must be my excuse for troubling you, Miss Beatoun."

Mr. Stites inclined his head and smiled again, but seemed rather at a loss for fitting words in which to tell exactly why he had thus given trouble to Miss Beatoun.

"The truth is," he began, afresh, "I'm awfully up against it. . . . I mean to say, don't you know, I'm awfully puzzled to make my position clear to you."

"But can't you tell me what you want to see me for?" inquired Mopsie, growing restive.

"That would have been easy enough," replied Mr. Stites "if you, for instance, had been anything like the lady—I mean the person—I expected you to be."

"And what sort of a person did you expect me to be?" asked Mopsie, willing to make a slight digression in the interest of a very natural curiosity.

"Why, that," returned Mr. Stites, "I can

hardly say, because I never had the slightest hint——”

“Mr. Stites,” Miss Beatoun interposed, “we don’t seem to be getting anywhere at all.”

“That’s so,” the gentleman admitted, humbly, “and it’s all my fault. You see, when I picked out this date to call on Mr. Beatoun, I had no idea that he was running for the legislature. I did not know how old he was, nor who he was, and as for you, Miss Beatoun, I naturally supposed that you were at least forty, and I thought that you must both be country people who would try to cheat and end by coming to a fair bargain.”

“What sort of a bargain?” Mopsie asked.

“Why, a bargain about Heartbreak Hill. I should have told you that I have a friend—I mean to say, a client—who might possibly buy——”

“Buy Heartbreak Hill?”

“I should say, make a reasonable offer, which you of course would be at perfect liberty to decline.”

“I should think so!” cried Miss Beatoun, warmly, for the thought of selling Heartbreak while its beacon blazed a welcome to the overlord returning flushed with victory, seemed too preposterous for serious consideration.

“Forgive me, please,” protested Mr. Stites.

"I think I know exactly how you feel. That is, I think I understand you do not feel disposed to sell, but just allow me, if you please, to carry out my instructions. Of course I cannot see your cousin and I do so want to get an answer. Please do not think me too insistent, but would you be willing to consider fifty dollars an acre?—just to consider it, you understand?"

"Certainly not!" returned Miss Beatoun with decision. She had never been an adept at mental arithmetic, nor had she the most remote idea how many acres were included in her patrimony, but she knew that fifty dollars did not sound like very much.

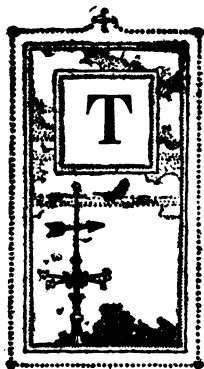
"Thanks, awfully!" exclaimed Mr. Stites, springing to his feet. "I am glad you did not take the offer, because if your property turned out to be more valuable I should have felt like a rascally real estate shark. Mind you, I know nothing of your property. I don't know what my people want it for. But I do know that I'm mighty glad I came down to Beatoun's Bridge."

Mr. Stites held out a friendly parting hand.

"Good-night," he said. "I shall live in the hope of a more formal introduction."

"Good-night," returned the lady, and in another moment Mr. Stites and his proposition had vanished from the room and from her life as far as Mopsie knew or cared.

CHAPTER VII



THE visit of Mr. Stites had been so whimsical, so odd, so altogether ludicrous that Mopsie indulged in a fit of solitary laughter. But by the time she heard the echoes of the vehicle that bore him back to Walton bridge, it began to dawn upon her that her own part in the interview had not been played with absolute discretion; that perhaps a less positive and final attitude would have been more becoming in an undivided half. And it was with such misgivings that she knocked at Uncle Abner's door, prepared to fib a little rather than betray a tribal secret in the absence of her chief. But by good luck no word of Mr. Stites had penetrated Colonel Wixom's book-lined walls, and by postponing bedtime long enough Aunt Lydia, already no doubt comfortably kimonoed, might possibly have gone to sleep.

Her uncle, seated at his flat topped desk, was deeply interested in a sheet of paper filled with figures.

"I have had a few more telephones," he said.
"The majority will be about three hundred."

"Splendid!" cried Mopsie. "Have you seen the bonfire?" she added.

"Oh, yes," he answered. "Old Heartbreak Hill is joining in the celebration royally."

Mopsie faced him with something of the old-time puppy wistfulness in her eyes.

"Uncle Abner," she said, "if you were us, if you were either of us, I mean, you would not sell it, would you?"

Uncle Abner chuckled.

"That's not a question that's likely to trouble either of you very much," he said.

"But suppose it did come up?—suppose that someone really wanted to buy it—for money?"

"How much money?" inquired the lawyer, noncommittally.

"Well, say fifty dollars an acre?"

"But Mopsie, child!—you can buy pretty good farming land about here for that, all you want of it."

"Really?"

"Oh, yes, indeed. And in the Heartbreak tract there must be—let me see!—how many acres?"

Mopsie had no idea. If she had been told she had forgotten, and the Colonel, ever accurate, produced a roll of paper from a lower drawer.

"Here is the map," he said, unrolling it before her, and Mopsie placed an inkstand and a paperweight upon the curling corners. It was an old map, tawny with age, made in the eighteen forties by one Nathan Button, Land Surveyor, who had painstakingly tinted the property green with spinach juice, the roads a realistically muddy brown with coffee, while the blue of Roundabout suggested household indigo. But the north point was a marvel of an elaborate design, and the neatly executed title read:

MAP
of Property of
Martin and Sidney Beatoun, Esqrs.
(Tenants in Common)
Situate in Beatoun Township
Containing
One hundred Acres More or Less.

"One hundred acres!" Mopsie gasped. "Oh, Uncle Abner, how much is fifty times one hundred?"

"Five thousand dollars," said the Colonel, "more or less."

"Really?"

For a moment the books appeared to leave their shelves and circle like a flock of frightened pigeons about Mopsie's head. The sum was fabulous beyond her grasp, as any other sum expressed in thousands would have been.

"Please don't put the map away just yet," she said to cover her confusion, and as she bent over his shoulder they set about discovering familiar points together, she with a paperknife and he with the handle of a pen. They recognised the woodland by Nathan Button's funny little pointed trees, and the marsh by tufts of grass set out at regular intervals. Even the chief topographical features were indicated by surveyors' hieroglyphics.

"Yes, that must be the Dismal Swamp," mused Mopsie. "And this must be the Cave of Midas. But what do you suppose this dotted line is, running straight across the map?"

The lawyer made a close examination.

"That is odd," he said, "and very interesting. I never noticed it before. There must have been in your great-grandfather's time some thought of a division, and this line was evidently meant to separate the halves. But as we know, the plan was never carried out. The land was hardly worth the trouble."

A simplified dissertation followed on partition suits, and Mopsie for the first time learned that the state of tenantry in common was not ordained by any law divine to be for better or for worse.

"But I don't think that you and Sidney need consider a division," the lawyer added.

Mopsie moved the paperweight and the map rolled up again with a snap.

"Let us go out a moment and look up at the fire," she suggested. And she added as they passed through the hall: "I was offended at you to-day, Uncle Abner, for letting the Van Buskirk boy take my place, and I'm not over it yet. It was humiliating."

The Colonel put away his glasses and refused to consider Mopsie's grievance very seriously.

"Don't be so sure that I am the one to blame," he cautioned her.

They walked far enough toward the gate to get an unobstructed view of Heartbreak Hill surmounted by a great red star.

"It ought to look much larger," Mopsie sighed.

But the beacon had been large enough for Sidney, speeding homeward in his hired campaign motor car, to see a great way off, and there had been no doubt in his mind as to who had thought of kindling it.

"I recognised Mopsie's weakness for spectacular effects at once," he said, laughing, when he found her with the Colonel on the rose-wreathed porch. "But why are not you folks in bed?" he added, throwing himself upon a step, well-nigh exhausted by his active day.

"We were only waiting," returned the elder gentleman, "to congratulate you, Sidney. We

hope and believe that this may prove to be the first step to a greater career."

"Thanks!" replied the victor, taking off his hat with mock solemnity. "This confidence on the part of my fellow-citizens has touched me deeply. . . . Come now, Mops!" he broke off. "Time for your little speech. Out with it!"

"I have no little speech to make," she answered from her shadowy corner. "Only I'm awfully, awfully proud to think we won."

He held out a hand in the dark to take hers—which was cold and tremulous—for one brief moment.

"That's a good girl!" he said, withdrawing his hand almost at once to light a cigarette.

When he had puffed in silence for a while the Colonel asked if he were tired.

Sidney gave a short laugh.

"Not very tired," was his answer, "but I do feel something like a chap who wakes up after a whack on the head to find himself shanghaied on board a ship bound for the Lord knows where."

"Why, what do you mean?" inquired Mopsie in dismay, for she had expected from him rather songs of victory and triumph.

"Nothing very much, Mops," he answered, "only that last month I had my plans all made

- for something rather different. I was going to find out whether college and the law school had really taught me anything or not. Now it appears I'm elected to occupy a seat in the minority corner of a hayseed legislature, and come back here once a week or so to talk over fertilisers with my staunch constituents. . . . Colonel, I think it must be that confounded Hill of ours. We simply can't throw it off."

Mopsie stood up, still in the shadow of the fat white pillar with its roses.

"I should think you might at least be grateful to them for electing you," she said.

It had meant a great deal to her when he took the nomination with the certainty it brought of weekly visits to the Meadow Farm. It had been something like the time, remembered long afterwards and re-remembered, when he was ready to give up his fishing trip for other walks with her on Heartbreak Hill. If tribal ties could weigh with him at all, they must have counted on the side of statesmanship.

"I suppose I am a thankless beast," he admitted, "but Heaven knows I never believed the forlorn hope was going to pull through."

"Nor did any of us. It was a personal victory," said the Colonel, quietly, "and one of which you may be justly proud."

"I believe you are cross to-night only because

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you are tired," put in Mopsie, willing, womanlike, to make allowance, but, also womanlike, leaving the allowance a little short of covering the fault. "I believe you are tired, and I shouldn't wonder in the least if you are hungry."

"I am," he answered, brightening, "very hungry. I hope you are not asking just from curiosity."

Mopsie laughed and ran into the house.

"Come to the dining-room, both of you, in exactly seven minutes," she cried across her shoulder.

"Count me out, child," the Colonel called after her. "I'm for bed—after I've given this boy a seven-minute talk on patriotism."

Sidney found her at the time appointed, standing at Aunt Lydia's polished dinner-table, breaking eggs into a chafing dish, and surrounded by a veritable grocery of attractive pots and pans and jars.

"Sit down at once," she commanded, pointing to a place she had made ready for him facing her. "Begin with anything you like while these are cooking. Shall I mix the chipped beef and the eggs together?"

"Yes, please," he said, "and lots of both. Mopsie, you have saved my life. I dined at six at the hotel at Mumford's Mills—great Cæsar's ghost!"

While he ate he told her something of the humours of the day; how his late opponent had telephoned facetious congratulations; and how an intoxicated supporter had sent up a cheer for Sidney Heartbreak of Beatoun Hill.

"Oh, by the way," she said—as if one thought had not been uppermost in her mind for an hour and more—"that reminds me, Sidney, of a rather funny visitor I had this evening——"

If the story of the visit as she then related it did not turn out to be excruciatingly amusing, it set forth important facts with reasonable accuracy. A strange young man had offered fifty dollars an acre for Heartbreak Hill and gone away again.

"And I think," she continued,—“that is, I am very sure,—that I refused it.”

"That was right," he said. "One should never jump at a first offer."

"But I was really quite positive——"

"Good. You are getting crafty, Mops."

Mopsie, stirring the eggs, experienced a thrill of something like elation.

"You would have refused yourself, wouldn't you?" she asked.

Sidney bit a piece of buttered cornbread thoughtfully.

"Perhaps I might not," he admitted. "I might have succumbed to the temptation. A

little ready money would come in mighty handy just now."

Mopsie almost dropped the spoon.

"But I thought that people could make lots of money in the legislature," she suggested.

"Not in any way that we understand," he answered. "There is not an honest penny to be made in politics."

"Oh, I am so sorry!" Mopsie moaned, stirring again, but so slowly that the edges of her dish began to sizzle.

"Sorry for what?"

"That I refused."

"Oh, never mind. If your young friend doesn't come around again we can look him up."

"Oh, Sidney, but we can't do that."

"Why not?"

"Because I don't know his address."

"Where did he come from?"

"He didn't tell me."

"What was his name?"

"Just Stites. I don't know any more."

"Why did he want the property?"

"He did not know himself."

Putting out the spirit lamp from force of habit, she sank into a chair despairingly.

"I acted like a perfect little idiot!" she said.

He rose and, standing beside her, laid a reassuring hand upon her head.

"Cheer up, old girl!" he said. "It's all right anyway."

"Oh, no, it isn't, Sidney," she persisted. "I had no right to speak for you. I had no right to even answer for myself without consulting you. I wish I had known then that we could cut the Hill in two and each take a half quite separate from the other."

"What do you mean by that, Mops?"

"I mean that Uncle Abner has a map that shows exactly how it can be done. The line comes just beyond the Cave of Midas, and, Sidney, we must really have what Uncle Abner calls a friendly suit, so that it can't be in my power to injure you again."

"Nonsense."

"It isn't nonsense," she insisted, "and I'm going to do it. You must agree to it, you really must."

"Oh, I'll agree to anything you wish," he said to comfort her.

"Then, which half will you take?" she demanded.

"I'll take the half you leave."

She hastily picked up two objects from the table and held them in either hand behind her back.

"Fork for the river side!" she cried. "Spoon for the fields! Now choose."

"Right hand!" he said, laughing at her earnestness.

"Spoon!" she announced, holding the implement in her right hand high above her head. "You take the field side and I take the river."

"Hold on," he protested. "I was only fooling."

"No," she replied, "it's settled just as much as though all the judges in the world had settled it."

"Please don't insist on this," he pleaded.

"Sidney," she said, "if you don't keep to this agreement I shall never be happy again."

"Well, it's a go," he laughed. "Now let's have some eggs."

As though by magic Mopsie's spirits rose once more. To put a folly beyond all chance of repetition does away with much of the necessity for repentance, and besides her cousin, after all, did not appear to be very much displeased.

"The eggs are great," he said.

"But aren't they a little burnt?"

"Yes, just enough to give the proper snap," he insisted, and he must have spoken truly, judging from results. "Mops," he went on, pushing back his chair, there being no more eggs to eat, "did you ever hear that people used to believe there was a mammoth on the property?"

"But not a live one?" she protested with awakening interest.

"No, not a live one, but the bones of one down underneath the marsh we used to call the Dismal Swamp."

No, Mopsie had heard nothing of the mammoth; the legend had been dropped before her time from popular belief, and Sidney went on to explain his reasons for recalling it.

"This Stites," he speculated, "may be a professor——"

"Oh, no!" she cried. "I am absolutely sure that he is not."

"Or the curator of a museum."

"Oh, Sidney! In a green hat?"

This argument was of course unanswerable.

"And he was glad you did not take up his offer," reflected Sidney, seeking vainly for another clue.

"So he said."

"But why?"

"Because——" Miss Beatoun hesitated—"because I think he liked me just a little."

"Confound his impudence!" cried Sidney, springing to his feet. "If the whole Hill was made of mammoths' bones he should not have a vertebra. Thanks for the feast, old girl. I'm off."

"Is the car waiting?"

"No. I sent the chauffeur back to Walton with the committee."

"You will miss it now, I'm afraid," she ventured as they went through the hall. "If I had not been so stupid you might have bought a car of your own."

"I might have this one for the asking," he rejoined. "The agents want me to accept it as a present."

"Why, isn't that nice of them!" Mopsie exclaimed, much impressed by this new proof of the inherent kindness of humanity.

"Hardly!" he chuckled. "They only want me to sign a little statement to the effect that I owe my election in a large measure to never missing a meeting or arriving at one a moment behind time—thanks to the Only Reliable Pleasure, Business, and Touring, etcetera, etcetera."

"But, Sidney," Mopsie protested, "isn't that almost true? And they only want you to say 'In a large measure,' anyhow. And——"

"Stop, Mopsie!" he cried in feigned alarm. "Remember the old story of the girl who once persuaded a man that biting an apple was not at all the same thing as eating fruit."

Mopsie tossed her head and sniffed.

"I always thought there was a mistake about that story," she rejoined. "Adam never could have missed such a chance of snubbing Eve."

He turned about to face her suddenly in the lighted hall. The window had blown open and the night air entered with a refreshing chill.

"Oh, Mops," he cried. "I must be a frightful prig."

"No," she replied with all a woman's sweet unreasonableness. "You are just a man—a stupid, domineering man. You can't understand that I may still feel badly about the money I deprived you of."

In another moment he might have convinced her that he understood at least a little, and that without any great expenditure of breath or argument.

"See here, Mopsie," he was beginning with a note of very real contrition in his voice, but Mopsie, moving quickly from him, interrupted:

"There is someone on the gravel path outside."

The someone, as it proved, was Mr. Peleg Prout, who lurked behind the shrubbery mysteriously.

"Come out here, both of you," he whispered, seeing that Mopsie was about to close the outer door.

"What's up?" demanded Sidney.

"Oh, nothing much, perhaps," explained Peleg. "Just something that I came across when we was gathering stuff to build the bonfire."

These things was hidden under some brush, and you can see yourselves that they was put there since it rained last."

As he held the lantern that he carried near the ground its light disclosed a pick and a spade, both new and shining.

"Now, these here things," continued Mr. Prout, "wasn't bought at Walton. There's no store there that handles goods of that make,—and how they came to be on top of Heartbreak Hill beats me for fair."

CHAPTER VIII



ELEG at the pony's head regarded Mopsie sitting in the buckboard buttoning on her gloves, and grinned. He grinned from principle, knowing that flunkeys never grin, and for the same good reason kept his hands thrust deeply in his trousers pockets. The buckboard stood before the homestead door, and from the position of the front wheels it was evident that another passenger was expected.

"How far are you going?" Mr. Prout inquired, stooping to blow in Pierrot's ear, a pleasantry no menial would have thought of.

Miss Beatoun drew the coils of a preposterously long veil a trifle tighter, for the wind after a night of rain had veered to northwest and in the open must be blowing half a gale.

"Oh, only to the Meadow Farm," she said. "We'll be back in less than an hour."

"Meadow Farm?" repeated Peleg. "Then I guess I'll go to work and paint them cellar doors if I can get the green to suit me."

"Won't that take longer than an hour?" Mopsie asked, feeling that a certain show of interest was expected of her, and Peleg, with his eyes upon the treetops, answered:

"Yes, it will take a durned sight longer than an hour."

Mopsie flushed, and Peleg chuckled, because in Beatoun County, where the generations took their turns at holding one another's horses, there was no such thing as caste. And when Colonel Wixom presently appeared he chatted freely with the ex-inebriate upon the topic just then uppermost in local interest.

"Don't you let Sidney fight that Trolley Bill too hard," Peleg cautioned. "Folks hereabouts want the cars even if they have to be robbed a little to get them."

"That's not the way they should feel," said the Colonel.

"Maybe not," admitted Peleg, "but it's the way they do feel, all the same."

"Oh, Uncle Abner, isn't this glorious?" cried Mopsie, when the two were well upon their way along the level mile which ended in the four fat chimneys of the Meadow Farm.

"Great!" acquiesced the Colonel. "I should like to be twenty years younger and ride a good horse straight across the fields, taking every fence."

It was indeed a wild young autumn morning that had somehow broken bonds to frolic for a little season in the peaceful flocks of summer. The west wind as it swept across the broad, flat country made boisterous grabs at Mopsie's veil, and caused the Colonel's long moustaches to expand ferociously. In the clear, rain-washed atmosphere one could see leagues and leagues of Beatoun County; count red barns by the dozen, comfortable homesteads by the score. Roundabout ran brimming full, and in the lowlands haycocks were afloat. Heartbreak Hill in silhouette against the blue stood like the burial cairn of some forgotten great barbarian who had once owned all the world.

Even Pierrot, catching something of the spirit of the wind, began to cut unwonted capers.

"I know exactly how you feel," cried Mopsie, laughing, as she brought the pony back to reason. "I should love to shy myself to-day; I should like to kick and run away."

It was a day when Titans might have sought each other out for the very joy of combat; a day when dogs delight to bark and bite; a day when maidens like their strongest lovers best.

"What was it that Sidney said by telephone?" asked Mopsie, during a momentary lull.

"Not much," her uncle answered. "He wanted to see us for five minutes if we were at

home, and I told him we were starting for a little drive and would drop in on him. I didn't think you would mind."

"But are you sure he meant me too?"

"I'm only sure of what he said."

"But you are sure he said me?" she persisted.

"Oh, absolutely," said her uncle, laughing.

"He said it was a matter of business."

"That's rather funny," she commented thoughtfully, "because I too have business to discuss with him."

"A most remarkable coincidence," said the Colonel.

"You may not believe me," she protested, pouting, "but you'll see."

Beatoun of Beatoun stood in waiting at the gate, and with him a retainer of his own age to take charge of Pierrot. Master and man wore worsted jackets and close-fitting little caps, and the wind had made their faces ruddy. As the two sprang forward to lay hands upon the guests and their equipage it seemed more like a capture than a welcome; as though hostages of consequence had surrendered to an enforced hospitality pending ransom. Sidney had become more masterful than ever in the few weeks since election, Mopsie thought; more bossy, more provocative of opposition.

"It was awfully good of you to come, sir," he

shouted, a full octave higher than the wind, as he grasped the descending Colonel firmly by the arm and urged him on, presumably toward handcuffs or a ball and chain.

"And wasn't it awfully good of me to come?" demanded Mopsie, who felt herself at least entitled to the dignity of a halter.

"Angellic!" he assured her. "Hop out, and I'll get Mrs. Button to give you a big red apple."

"I don't want your old apple," she replied, hopping out perforce, and she might have added something disparaging of the worthy Mrs. Button had she been certain that the retainer was not of the Button tribe.

Now the Buttons tilled the fertile acres of the Meadow Farm on shares, and tilled them to the best advantage possible. They also occupied what might be called the lion's portion of the great four-chimneyed house, if lions ever lived in houses of their own volition. Moreover, Mrs. Button had been Sidney's very earliest acquaintance. She had given him his first repast—"just to accommodate," of course—which would have made her eldest son his foster-brother had Beatoun County counted such relationships. Therefore, or rather nevertheless, Miss Beatoun did not care particularly for Mrs. Button, while on the other hand that estimable woman persisted in regarding Mopsie as a hopeless victim

of the maple sugar habit. In mentioning Mrs. Button Sidney had been guilty of a want of tact.

"Go in!" he urged, driving his captives ruthlessly before him across his own especial garden, which was mostly tennis court, toward the spacious wing which he had changed according to his own ideas of comfort.

Sidney's quarters had about them a snug unmarried smell of mingled leather and tobacco, smoked and unsmoked, brought into perfect harmony by dog soap and a certain Chinese incense which he fondly fancied to be pleasing to the feminine nose.

"Dear me! How clean we look!" sniffed Mopsie with a mild attempt at patronage as she entered.

"Why shouldn't we be clean?" returned her cousin. "There hasn't been a broom in here to stir up dust for weeks. Sit down," he added, dictatorially.

He chose the largest of many armchairs to reduce in area for Mopsie's benefit, with cushions much like bags of corn in size and weight. The outdoor impetus was still upon him; the domineering spirit of the wind.

"I'll sit down, but I won't be fed. Remember that," said Mopsie.

"You will find some chocolate drops beside you," returned her cousin.

Mopsie's face remained as though she had not heard, but it is difficult to be truly dignified in a chair whose depth will not permit one's feet to touch the floor.

The Colonel had discovered for himself an upright and judicial seat behind a broad judicial table upon which lay a magazine or two and several county papers of the patented inside variety. Beatoun of Beatoun took his place before the open fireplace, filled now with feathery asparagus in a lordly jar of Aztec pottery. Behind him on the mantel stood a wonderful collection of assorted trash: pipes, tankards, jugs and rackets, trophies of the court, the cinder-track and the river, and the three-handled cup awarded to the most popular fellow in his class. There was a story written in the rubbish, and the moral of it might have been that all things come to him who takes himself for granted; and certainly Sidney Beatoun had that faculty.

He clasped his hands behind his back and frowned in doubt how best to state the subject of the conference. Presently, as though the asparagus had thawed him slightly by its genial warmth, he said:

"You don't look very comfortable, Mops."

"I'm not," his cousin answered.

"Then take a chocolate drop."

"Thanks." She knew him well enough to ap-

prehend that he might forget to repeat the invitation.

"Colonel—" began Sidney.

The Colonel pushed aside his paper, rapped officially, and said:

"The gentleman from Heartbreak has the floor."

Mopsie put back the chocolates on the table, having secreted three beneath her gloves.

"It's Heartbreak that I want to talk about," said Sidney.

"Bother!" remarked Miss Beatoun.

Sidney drew himself erect.

"I want to tell you that I received last night an offer for the Hill which I refused point blank," he said.

"Indeed!" from Colonel Wixom.

"Oh, I am so glad!" from Mopsie, who had not been altogether easy in her mind since her own refusal of the gold of Mr. Stites.

"Too low?" suggested the Colonel.

"No," said Sidney, "it was much too high, but quite impossible to accept. In point of fact, it was made me by this trolley company that is seeking a charter from the legislature to lay tracks along every highway in the county."

"Oh, won't that be convenient!" Mopsie exclaimed.

"Perhaps," he answered, looking down upon her with disapproval; "it might be a good thing

for the farmers if the company would pay a proper compensation for the franchise."

"Uncle Abner, what is a franchise?" asked Mopsie.

"A privilege," suggested Colonel Wixom.

"A steal," corrected Sidney. "At least, in this case that is what it means,—a grab, a robbery which I intend to fight in the legislature to the bitter end."

"But are not the country people favourably disposed toward the road?" the Colonel asked.

"No doubt," replied the statesman, "they are fascinated by the idea of riding into town for five cents——"

"I should think they would be," interrupted Mopsie, edging forward until her feet encountered firm support. But once again her cousin seemed displeased with her.

"Just listen, Mops," he said, with an all too evident endeavour to be kind and patient. "You don't quite understand. The company should agree to limit its capital stock to the actual cost of construction and equipment. And after paying reasonable interest on the first investment the profits should go toward keeping up the country roads, providing pensions for employees, and several other things."

"Of course!" she readily admitted. "Why don't you tell them they must do so?"

"Exactly what I did," he answered. "I in-

sisted on an equitable charter. I represent the district most affected, and if they passed that bill against my opposition the Governor would hardly dare to sign it."

"And how was your suggestion met?" inquired Colonel Wixom.

"Met?" exclaimed Sidney, bringing down his fist upon the mantel-shelf with a force that caused the pipes thereon to rattle, "met by an offer to buy Heartbreak Hill for twenty thousand dollars,—of course providing that the bill became a law."

The silence following this announcement was so profound that Mopsie fancied she could hear her cousin breathe. The Colonel put his fingertips together and considered deeply.

"What reason did they give for making such an offer?" asked the elder man at length, "what possible excuse?"

"They pretended," said the younger, drily, "that they wanted Heartbreak for a sort of pleasure park connected with their system. They spoke of a switchback running to the top, toboggan slides and Japanese tea-houses, and that sort of rubbish. They said that it would bring travel in the summer time."

"How lovely," put in Mopsie, with so much enthusiasm that even Uncle Abner gave her a repressive glance.

"But, Mops, can't you see," cried Sidney, now openly annoyed, "that the offer was intended simply to silence my opposition, to buy my support? that it was neither more nor less than so much hush-money?"

"My boy, don't let us go quite so fast," protested Colonel Wixom. "The offer may be genuine."

"Oh, genuine enough!" allowed Sidney, fuming up and down the hearthrug. "A genuine, unvarnished bribe; the sort of thing a fellow can't resent because it's got to be so usual. These grafters kindly permit the hayseeds to vote for whom they please, and count on buying the poor devil who is elected. The people can be blinded by the promise of a little temporary convenience to forget the fundamental principles of right and wrong. I don't expect them to uphold me in this fight."

"What would you have them do?" urged the Colonel.

"I'd have them hold out for their rights if they had to walk to town and back for ten years more."

"In ten years," said the Colonel, "many of us will be in no need of little temporary conveniences."

Sidney bit his lip.

"Perhaps in ten years," Mopsie ventured to

observe, "everybody will own automobiles or even flying machines, and it will make no difference whether they have trolley cars or not."

The Colonel laughed.

"And then all our altruistic anxiety will have been thrown away," he said

Sidney turned upon his cousin sharply.

"I'm not discussing serious things with silly babies," he declared.

Miss Beatoun was upon her feet at once.

"Sidney!" she cried, confronting him, "I'm not a silly baby. I understand exactly what you have been telling us, and I say that if I were a farmer living away off in the country, I should care more to have a nice clean trolley car right at my door than for any fundamental principle of right or wrong."

"Fortunately," returned Sidney, "that question doesn't concern you in the least."

The speech was petulant and boyish, and lacking altogether in the dignity of tribal leadership,—a fiction difficult to maintain, perhaps, beneath the quiet twinkle in the Colonel's eye.

"Mopsie has a perfect right to have opinions," Mopsie's guardian interposed. "Her interest in the Hill is equal to your own; you should not forget that, Sidney."

"True!" assented Sidney with a bitter laugh.

"I keep forgetting that if I were to sell my vote—my honour—Mopsie would be entitled to one-half the price of it."

"I should not take it," cried Mopsie, her cheeks aflame. "You know I should not, Sidney. How can you dare say such a horrid thing?"

"Because it's true." And thrusting both hands into his jacket pockets he made a rapid, aimless circuit of the room. Coming in the end to a halt in front of Colonel Wixom's table, he continued in a voice intended to be calm and resolute: "There is only one way out of this, only one. I am going to deed my half of Heartbreak Hill to Mopsie as a gift. She need not thank me for it, for it is not worth a cent—that is, an honest cent. I'll sign a quit claim deed to-day and see that it is properly recorded."

"You shall do nothing of the sort!" she cried. "I'll not accept such a present."

"You must accept!" he snapped back at her. "You can't get out of it. I have a right to deed my property to anyone I please, and if you don't believe me, ask the Colonel"—here he turned to Uncle Abner and continued with a touch of irony, "And now, sir, it will be up to you to see that the interests of your ward are well protected. Now she can sell off to this philanthropic company for twenty thousand dollars; if they

still want to buy when I derive no possible advantage from the transaction."

"Sidney," Mopsie interrupted, "if I owned all of Heartbreak Hill to-day I should not sell it for twenty thousand dollars. I should not think of doing so; no, not for a single moment."

"Why not?" he demanded.

"Because," she answered, "I believe it to be much more valuable. You have been scolding me and bossing me and making speeches to me about honour and fundamental right and wrong, but it never occurs to you that all the while I may have wishes and opinions of my own."

"Oh, indeed!" cried Sidney with a rather supercilious snort, and the Colonel chuckled in the firm belief that his niece was engaged in making what in vulgar speech is often called a bluff. Furthermore, it amused him mightily to see the cousins pitted thus one against the other.

"The member from Beatoun's Bridge has the floor!" he ruled, again employing his knuckle as a parliamentary gavel. Mopsie moved to Sidney's place before the fireplace and drew a folded paper from her belt.

"I have listened patiently to you," she began, her eyes upon her cousin, "and now you must listen patiently to me. That's only fair. I have a letter here I should have shown you long ago if you had given me a chance. Now I am going

to read it aloud. Please smoke something and don't stand staring at me like a grizzly bear."

Sidney lit a cigarette as though it were the fuse of an explosive bomb, and Mopsie, spreading out her paper with great deliberation, began to read.

" ' . . . Office of Stites, Brimley & Stites, Boulder Building, New York—' "

"Who the dickens may they be?" demanded Sidney, taking a step toward her, his hand held out as though he quite expected her to let him do the reading.

"Keep away from me," she cautioned. "I didn't bother you when you had the floor."

"But who——?"

"Please listen. Don't be so impatient. I didn't——"

"Will you kindly inform me who these people are?"

Mopsie held the letter to the light for several aggravating seconds.

"They seem to be Bankers and Dealers in High-class Investment Securities," she explained.

"Bosh!" commented Sidney. "Dealers in High-class Humbug.—Well, go on."

" ' . . . Miss Beatoun, Beatoun's Bridge,' " continued Mopsie in impressive accents, " ' Dear Madam: ' That is what they say, but of course it is a mistake; they should have said, ' Dear

Silly Baby' or 'Respected Idiot' . . . 'Referring to your conversation with the junior member of our firm on the seventh prox. . . .' that must have been the day of the election . . . 'we beg to say that we have communicated your answer to the party in whose interest we made an offer for your property, but have as yet received no definite instructions in the matter. We understand, however, that negotiations may be reopened should you so desire. Our Mr. Samuel Stites expects to be in the vicinity of Beatoun's Bridge in the near future, and we should esteem it a favour if you will allow him an opportunity for further consultation. Believe us to remain, dear Miss Beatoun, very faithfully yours, Stites, Brimley and Stites.' Three of them!" Miss Beatoun added. "Just think! And all mine very faithfully!"

"Good!" cried the Colonel, far from certain that his ward had not invented the entire epistle on the spot.

"Three sharpers! Three infernal cheats!" commented Mr. Beatoun.

"Oh, no, they are not!" Mopsie protested. "They are members of the New York Stock Exchange—it says so on the corner of the paper"—she referred to the letter once more—"that is, Mr. Gerard Stites is a member, and so is Mr. Robert Brimley, but Mr. Samuel Stites is not—

I suppose they called him Sammy when he went to school."

"If he ever shows himself in Beatoun's Bridge again I'll teach him how to swim in Roundabout," observed the statesman, as he shot his cigarette into the fireplace.

"Oh, Sidney, please let him come just once. You know it is such a novelty for me to be consulted with."

"That is all he wants,—the scamp!"

"Oh, do you really think so?"

"Absolutely certain of it."

Miss Beatoun's face expressed her sorrow for the perfidy of mankind.

"I know what I shall do," she said; "I shall deed my half of Heartbreak Hill to you, and then we shall see if Mr. Stites still wants to buy it when I derive no possible advantage from the transaction."

Sidney burst into a roar of purely artificial merriment.

"By all means send for Sammy Stites," he cried with biting irony. "And tell the gentleman if he has Wall Street gold bricks to dispose of, Beatoun's Bridge is just the place for him."

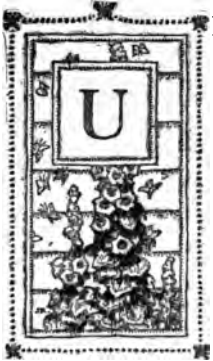
The Colonel, rising, said that it was time to go. The conference was rapidly degenerating into a tribal quarrel, which would no doubt in due season settle itself without his intervention.

"No, no!" persisted Sidney, "you must stay to luncheon. I'll have it on the table in a minute."

"But it isn't twelve o'clock yet," Mopsie laughed.

She was still laughing as she gathered up the reins. And Sidney could see her small white teeth as she turned to nod good-bye to him. But half way on the road to home, with Heartbreak looming large before them in the light of noon, she gave her guardian a scrap of fragmentary wistful confidence.

CHAPTER IX



UNCLE ABNER, I suppose you think me awfully silly," Mopsie said, by way of a beginning.

"Silly?" he repeated. "Not a bit of it." The words were reassuring, but his manner seemed abstracted and his deep-set eyes fixed on some horizon much farther off than that of Beatoun County. He sat erect with shoulders squared, a soldier truly for the moment, the veteran of innumerable unrecorded conflicts.

The riot of the winds had been suppressed and there was nothing left to show for all the tumult now except a fallen twig of green leaves here and there, already withering in the heat.

"If I was not silly, Sidney must have been," Mopsie urged, as though the question were of great importance.

"Good God, no!" said the Colonel. "Don't think that. There is nothing finer in this world of ours than a brave boy conscious of his strength and eager for a tilt with his first windmill."

"But why am I a windmill?" she demanded, mystified.

"I don't mean you, child," said her uncle, coming back to earth. "I mean this Trolley Monster that threatens to devour us alive unless the Giant Killer saves us."

"Indeed," returned the tribe, in arms at once, "I think that Sidney is exactly right about all that."

"Then why in the name of common sense didn't you tell him so?"

"Because I don't like people to suppose I have no opinions of my own."

The Colonel thought her reason over for a second, laughing softly to himself. It was in every way a satisfactory answer.

"If you were to let Sidney know that you agree with him occasionally," he suggested, "you two might get along much better."

"We shall never do that," said Mopsie with conviction. "Things were bad enough before, but now that there is a real excuse we shall quarrel worse than ever."

"But why should you quarrel?" he protested.

"We can't help it," Mopsie cried. "It will go on and on until we hate each other, and Heartbreak Hill will be responsible for it all." She shook her whip towards the smiling little mountain in half serious defiance; the corners of her

mouth drawn downward in the old baby fashion and her red lip trembling. "Oh, please, please, make him take whichever half he wants," she pleaded, "and let me have the other."

"But I thought that you two had already settled that between yourselves by drawing lots?"

"I thought so too, but Sidney now insists it was all done in fun—to humour me, I suppose he means."

"Surely you don't wish to go to law?"

"Oh, no, no, uncle," Mopsie cried. "Law is only meant to bind people who want to cheat. Of course if Sidney were to make a promise seriously he would keep it just as I should, and of course——" she knit her brows, endeavouring to frame some line of argument which persistently refused to fit itself to words. The result, though somewhat cryptic, served to open Colonel Wixom's eyes.

"It would be different, wouldn't it, if Sidney and I were brother and sister, for example?" she propounded.

"I think I understand, child," he replied, "and you are right. You should each be free and independent, free to act and answer for yourselves—unless——"

"Unless what, uncle?"

The Colonel chuckled.

"Do you recall a certain pet squirrel that you

used to torment years ago?" he asked with little seeming relevance.

"You must mean Sherlock Holmes," she speculated.

"I mean the little chump who scurried back into his cage again whenever he was set at liberty."

"Oh, that was Teddy. He had been brought up in captivity, you remember, and did not know what it meant to be free."

"My point exactly," said the Colonel, laughing, and Mopsie wondered why it was that people who were usually kind and fair considered it justifiable to make fun of girls. But Uncle Abner had an undisputable right to treat her as a babe, and when she spoke again it was with the acceptance of the fact.

"Would you mind very much speaking to this Mr. Stites if he should really come?" she ventured.

"Mind?" said the Colonel. "Not in the least. In fact, I plan to put that enterprising young gentleman on the rack and find out for myself exactly what he is made of before he has another opportunity to discuss his business proposition with my ward."

"Oh!" sighed Miss Beatoun, very much relieved, and presently she added, "Uncle, there is one thing that perhaps I forgot to mention."

"No doubt," he said. "What was it, child? He hasn't been here again, has he?"

"No; but his letter is three days old. I've not seen anything of Sidney lately, and I thought he ought to hear about it first,—I wasn't sure just how to act, and—and—oh, dear! It's all a part of these two wretched undivided halves."

"It's all right, anyway," declared her uncle. "Leave the rest to me." And Mopsie's hand stole into his confidently and lingered until Pierrot broke into his customary home-stretch canter and Bill rushed out to welcome them, with Peleg following more sedately.

Mr. Prout held up three fingers of his left hand spread apart, each one a different shade of cheerful green.

"Which one of them's the prettiest?" he demanded, grinning.

Mopsie pronounced in favour of the index finger, the Colonel seemed at first disposed to choose the third, while Peleg's personal preference was for the middle one.

"But I guess young ladies' tastes is surest to be right," he gallantly admitted as he wiped the hand imperfectly upon his overalls.

"Did you folks fix it up to sell out Heartbreak to the Trolley crowd?" he asked when the Colonel had gone in.

"Why, how in the world did you know any-

thing about that?" demanded Mopsie. She had lingered to give Pierrot's velvet nose a parting stroke.

Peleg continued the cleansing process upon a bunch of leaves.

"It's funny, isn't it? how things do get about," he moralised. "I should not be surprised if every farmer in the county had tacked on ten dollars an acre to his land since last night when the Company made that offer. Come along, Skeesicks, and get your dinner. I'll just bet them Buttons never offered you so much as a bite."

"No, Peleg, but——" Miss Beatoun was beginning when she happened to remember that she did not answer to the name of Skeesicks.

As the buckboard moved away she crossed the garden to the seat among the lilacs, Madame Triboulet's favourite, and there sat down to speculate on many things, not least among them how it was that Peleg Prout, who never left the place, became possessed of so much information. And it was while thus profitably employed that she became aware of echoes not exactly new but still by no means usual in the covered bridge.

"Automobile!" cried out Peleg from the stables. "Look!"

"I'm looking!" Mopsie called back as she glided to the hedge row for a better view. A very little in the way of novelty went far at



The Colonel.

Beatoun's Bridge, and in that year of grace a large red motor car was something of a novelty. The car emerged from out the dark arch of the bridge with all the self-assurance of a cuckoo from a chalet clock. For a moment it appeared to perch irresolute, and then with one swift flight it took the hill and came to rest almost at Mopsie's feet.

It must have been an admirable car, for it made no wild unseemly noises, nor did it shock the flowering shrubbery with noxious smell. It started without a protest and it stopped without a threat. It was not one of those vehicles which, while having parted with so many of the noble attributes of waggonhood, still fail to realise the full responsibilities of self-propulsion. It was either a Chesterfield among cars or else much credit was due to the individual responsible for its behaviour. This person in Miss Beatoun's mind became at once the Porcupine, by reason of long spiney hair, and goggles which resembled huge, protruding eyes.

Miss Beatoun found this thought so pleasant that she did not realise at once that in the tonneau sat her old acquaintance, Mr. Samuel Stites. Perhaps she might not have recognised him at all in his little cap and flowing robe of khaki had he not stood up and bared his head.

"Why, how d'ye do?" he cried.

"I'm very well indeed," retorted Mopsie, "thank you."

With his hair a trifle rumpled and his necktie buttoned out of sight he was more presentable, she thought, than at their last meeting, and the consciousness that her own hat was becoming made her welcome of him rather warmer than she had planned it should be.

"If you go on a little farther you will find a gate," she said. "I don't believe your car could turn around inside."

"All right," he said, and repeated the instruction to the Porcupine, who apparently could hear no words not aimed directly at his spiney ears.

Mr. Stites had reached the Walton House the night before from any one of several places which he mentioned in a breath when he had finally entered. He hoped he had not chosen too early an hour for a visit, and then again he hoped that it was not too late for absolute convenience. On being reassured on both these points he said that it was very kind of Miss Beatoun to let him come at all.

"I didn't," she reminded him. "You came entirely without permission."

"But business knows no law," he pleaded, looking very much as though he would accept an invitation to sit down if pressed.

"I don't know anything of business," answered Mopsie, "and so you had better see my guardian, Colonel Wixom; he's at home."

"I should be very pleased indeed," said Mr. Stites, untruthfully. At the sight of Mopsie he had felt the elation which is sure to follow the removal of a carking doubt. Since the day of the election he had been speculating off and on how Miss Beatoun would appear by daylight, for experience had taught him not to put an overweening confidence in lamps, and the broker was a prudent man in all his dealings. High-class investments were his specialty; gilt-edged securities; and he prided himself on his ability to size up almost any proposition. At present he was sizing up Miss Beatoun somewhat openly.

"By Jove, I'm awfully glad I came," he said.

"Do you like the country?" she inquired.

"No," he replied. "Not very much."

"They say it's very healthy here."

"It must be."

"Of course, the country is rather flat until you get accustomed to it."

"It looks all right to me for golf."

"It is. My cousin has a nine-hole course, but we can't play until the hay is cut on account of the Buttons. That is my cousin's house down in the valley with the four fat chimneys."

She wished that Mr. Stites would look at anything besides herself, but he refused to do so.

"I know your cousin's house," he said, without so much as a blink in its direction. "I called on him when I was here before."

"Yes, I remember," said Mopsie, backing slowly toward the porch. "That was the night he was elected to the legislature."

"Something of the sort," he admitted, more occupied with wonder that a rustic maid should look so thoroughly up-to-date, for, like the Ancient, Mr. Stites was nothing if not critical. Meanwhile Miss Beatoun backed inch by inch, and the broker followed, drawn toward the rack.

"How do you do, sir?" said the Colonel, waiting for no form of introduction. "You are Mr. Stites? I'm pleased to see you, sir. Step right into my study and we'll get at once to business. Mopsie, child, please see that we are not disturbed."

He had pounced upon them like a smiling spider from the front door, and with the adroit business methods of a spider he bore away his prey. It was not considerate of the Colonel so to disregard his niece's rights. Young Stites had come directly to her gossamer of his own accord, seeking to be enmeshed, dismembered and devoured, and now she must perforce give up those simple pleasures.

Mopsie was rather glad when Mrs. Dacer slipped across the road to impart an astounding piece of news, and incidentally discover what was going on.

"I saw that you were alone," she explained, "and I was sure that you would like to be the first to know that my brother, Frederick Lawlor, is actually coming here to visit me."

Mopsie expressed a suitable degree of interest. In a vague way she had always thought of the great man's advent as accompanied by boom of cannon and blare of bands, and it did seem tame that he should just drop down on Beatoun's Bridge for a fortnight's visit like an ordinary mortal—Sammy Stites, for instance. But she did her best to seem enthusiastic, and kept Mrs. Dacer talking on the back veranda until the red car took its flight again to Walton. She listened to its horn sounding faint and faraway through Heartbreak woods without regret, perceiving with a sense of divination that it was not by any means the last she should hear of Sammy Stites; a conviction shortly to be fortified by the Colonel.

The broker had, it appeared, made rather a favourable impression in the torture chamber. On the rack he owed to an intention to acquire Heartbreak, if possible, on behalf of a personage almighty throughout brokerdom. This man, whose name must be kept for the present a secret,

was at once an open-handed philanthropist, a generous patron of the arts and sciences, and a brigand in the field of speculation. Mr. Stites could not so much as guess in which of these capacities he had turned his eyes toward Beaton's Bridge. It might be that he planned a great observatory, or a refuge for consumptives. Or it might be that he had some deeper and more sinister end in view. At all events, his wishes had the force of law with such as Mr. Stites; albeit the broker made it clear that Mopsie's interests should not be neglected.

"Stites may be nothing but a harmless ass," observed the Colonel kindly, "but I think that we may safely let him play about a little."

Mopsie bit into a giant strawberry; for this conversation took place at the time of luncheon.

"Oh, by the way, Mr. Lawlor is coming," she announced, and at once another possibility presented itself. Aunt Lydia was convinced that Mrs. Dacer's brother would turn out to be the hidden power.

"He means to build her a magnificent house," she sighed, "and overshadow us."

CHAPTER X



MISS AGNES LAWLOR, stenographer in ordinary to the well-known house of Stites, Brimley and Stites, dealers in high-class investment securities, et cetera, et cetera, occupied during business hours a cubicle of glass partitions between the general gathering place of customers and the innermost arcana of the firm. In some way the steady beating of her typewriter seemed to reprove the intermittent outbursts of excited tickers, nervous newsmachines and overwrought electric fans, while she herself became an object lesson in repose; a sermon on the dignity of work expressed in terms of flesh and blood, and none too much of either. She worked seven hours every day and six days every week, and apparently found life—unruffled by successive booms and slumps—quite satisfactory on the whole. What she possessed was hers, and hers by right of conquest, and once the office doors had closed behind her she was answerable to no man living.

But these are matters foreign to this narrative,

which finds her in her cubicle engaged in directing the last envelope of the evening mail. The letters are beside her, signed but still unfolded, and the office boy who should be helping her is elsewhere polishing his boots. From the outer room the customers have vanished long since, and the firm—that is to say, the greater and the lesser Stites, for Brimley is potentially a myth—are in the inner office still discussing the events of a busy day.

Miss Lawlor would herself have been upon the homeward way had not a visitor delayed her work and caused her to betray a most unusual impatience.

“Father,” she said, “it’s getting late. Perhaps you’d better go. Perhaps Mr. Stites might be displeased——”

She cast a glance of apprehension toward the door with “Private” lettered on the glass.

“Damn Stites!” replied the visitor composedly.

He was a tall, good-looking man with black hair and moustache slightly tinged with grey, who might have been a rather rakish member of the Stock Exchange but for suggestions, vague but unmistakable, here and there about him, of the first stages of deterioration. In short, Mr. Lawlor, though not exactly shabby, produced on the observer much the same impression as a fine

house that has stood some months without a tenant.

He had been always a reckless speculator on narrow margins, who when the market went against him generally managed to save enough for another start. Once comfortably rich, of late he had gone down steadily, until a flurry in the Street had put a termination to his ventures and turned him from a welcome customer at Stites, Brimley and Stites to that position lowest in the scale of banking life, a "down and outer," despised of office boys.

Agnes prepared to seal her letters.

"Father," she said, "come and eat your dinner with me to-night."

"Thanks!" was the answer. "Awfully sorry, dining out to-night,—business men, Waldorf or Sherry's, can't remember—scarcely my treat, eh, what? . . . Oh, by the way, if you had fifty cents to spare——"

"Please help yourself," she said, giving him her purse. "Take all except enough for carfare and a paper, if you want it."

Mr. Lawlor poked a long forefinger in the handful of small change, found a silver half-dollar, and returned the purse.

"This will do," he said, "and much obliged. I'll give it back to you on Saturday, so help me God—I think!"

"No hurry," replied his daughter, licking an envelope. "And now, go, before we are caught."

As he stood idly flipping up the coin to test his luck an electric buzzer sounded.

"That means another letter to be taken down, and written and sent off. See what I get by staying overtime!" cried Agnes. Then, stepping to the door marked "Private," she disappeared.

Mr. Lawlor having yawned and looked about him, went back to the table where the letters lay, some sealed and others open. A casual inspection of the first revealed one only deserving of a second glance—an ordinary commercial envelope this, but addressed in the younger Stites' handwriting, and tossed in with the rest for mailing.

"Hello!" he muttered. "'Miss Beatoun, Care of Colonel Wixom, Beatoun's Bridge, via Walton,' eh, what? . . . It's odd, damned odd, the cuss should write to anyone in Beatoun's Bridge."

He ran his thumbnail along the flap, but finding the mucilage exceptionally adhesive, tossed the letter back, repeating to himself, "Damned odd!"

The open letters gave him less annoyance, but they were for the most part business formulas with which he had been only too familiar. . . .

"We have sold for your account and risk" or
"We have bought" or "We beg to state."

"Bosh!" commented Mr. Lawlor. "Same old buncombe, same old bluff." But presently he came upon something really worth attention; a letter labelled "Confidential," and addressed to one whose smallest secrets had a market value. "Why, look who's here!" cried Lawlor, puckering his lips, and forthwith he read:—

"DEAR SIR:

"Replying to your favour of yesterday we beg to say that Mr. Samuel Stites, our junior partner, has arranged to give the matters of which you write immediate and personal attention.

"We believe it advisable that our representative should be on the ground as other interests are about to make an effort to secure the property, and unless otherwise advised we shall interpret your instructions 'Buy at any price' literally, though this may involve an expenditure far beyond the present market value of land in Beatoun County. We shall, of course, use all discretion and, if necessary, make terms with our competitors. But we should be glad to know the limit of our authority in the event of an open competition, and most respectfully suggest that a fuller confidence would enable us, perhaps, to serve your interests more intelligently.

"With renewed assurances of our pleasure in conducting the negotiation, we beg to remain. . ."
et cetera, et cetera. . . .

"The devil you do!" interpolated Mr. Lawlor. "Pretty sly, my boys, but why mention Beatoun County? Might give dishonest folks an inkling, eh, what? Might put some sleuth upon the scent. 'Competition'? 'Buy at any price'? Good chance for an enterprising party to butt in, eh, what?"

He slipped the letter to the bottom of the pile, took up a pen, found unofficial paper, and began to write:

"My Dear Louisa, best of sisters and most amiable of women . . ."

Lawlor read the line and gave it an approving wink.

" . . . Am feeling rather out of sorts with overwork," he wrote again, "and my specialist advises country air and the joys of domesticity. So, naturally, I turn to you and to the rural charms of Beatoun's Bridge, that paradise of rest which unkind fate has hitherto prevented me from entering. Taking my welcome for granted, I shall follow this almost at once, but don't, I beg of you, make any preparations. I can live on buttermilk, sleep on hay, do chores about the place for relaxation, and in the even-

ings play dominoes with parsons, children or old ladies. In short, I aim to please. I am bringing you a . . ."

Mr. Lawlor paused with pen suspended for a moment.

"What the deuce am I bringing?" he inquired of himself. "What dainty trifle would appease and gratify Louisa?" And being inspired, he wrote "parasol."

"Good!" he cried. "Ah, that will please Louisa if little brother don't forget it."

The signature was simply "Fred," and the address read:

"Mrs. Peter Dacer,
Beatoun's Bridge,
via Walton."

As he wrote "Peter" he remarked, "The biggest duffer ever born!" And he was obliged to look again at Mopsie's letter to remember Walton.

"Thus," he cried, picking with moistened fingertip a stamp from Agnes' supply, "the wily villain once more joins the merrie, merrie dance!"

But Mr. Lawlor as he left the cubicle had certainly devised no plan of action by which the somewhat meagre information he had gained

could be turned to profit. His active brain, grown weary of feeding on his own misfortunes, seized eagerly this opportunity for a change of diet. It seemed to him that luck had passed its aphelion and had turned his way again at last. And this unreasonable conviction brought an elation such as he had never thought to feel again. Ambition stirred once more and hope revived; like sailors on a derelict they roused themselves to rig a jury mast and man the broken pumps.

In the outer room Jones the office boy stood before his own reflection in the portrait of old Brimley, neatly framed and glazed, putting on a very high clean collar, his unattractive countenance distorted after the manner of all those who button collars.

"Hello, old sport!" he said with insolent familiarity. "Here yet?"

"Jones," rejoined Lawlor, "you were always an offensive little whelp, and so some day I shall hope to see your finish."

Jones, being something of a sycophant, perceived at once that Mr. Lawlor's attitude toward life had undergone a change.

"Upon my word, I did not see who it was," he lied. "You know I never get too fresh with customers."

"It's some time since I've been a customer," returned the other, mollified, for few words could

have been more agreeable at the moment than were Jones' lies.

Jones brushed his jacket carefully.

"Oh, you'll be playing the market again, I'll bet a hat," he said.

"I think not," answered Lawlor with a yawn. "Country real estate's the thing now."

Jones, as he drew his necktie tighter, gave a wink.

"We have been getting confidential orders from headquarters lately in that very line," he remarked.

"Oh, really, have you?" drawled the financier, and sauntered toward the outer door, for in the cubicle the typewriter had resumed activity.

"Where did you get your tip?" Jones turned up the bottoms of his trousers, though he always gave the members of the firm three minutes' start in going home.

"Oh, I manage to keep up to date. Good-afternoon."

"So long."

When Mr. Lawlor had descended to the lobby of the Boulder Building he took an unobtrusive inventory of his waistcoat pockets, which resulted in his daughter's late half-dollar, a nickel and a cent. The first he carefully put back; the second he invested at the bootblacking stand, and with the third he bought an evening paper. By the

time the younger Mr. Stites came darting from the elevator the financier had advanced still farther toward his old self-confident, aggressive bearing.

"Hold on, young man. I want to speak to you a moment," he called out.

"I'm late for an appointment," said the broker, coming to a reluctant halt. "In fact, I haven't got a moment."

"Then lend me twenty-five dollars and be on your way in half the time . . . eh, what?"

Young Mr. Stites stood still, for after his fashion he was an open-handed man, and in times past Lawlor's business had been profitable.

"I'm awfully sorry," he began, "but damn it all, man! This sort of thing can't go on forever."

"Quite right!" assented the ex-customer, whose assurance unpleasantly suggested highway robbery. "This twenty-five shall be the last."

"But it's not fair, it's not reasonable," protested Mr. Stites. "Now, if a dollar or two would do you any good——" he added.

"Not a bit of good," the other interrupted, "not the least good in the world."

"Then, I'm afraid I must say 'no.' I'm awfully sorry, but . . ."

"Don't mention it," cried Lawlor. "Here's another proposition. Let me have the money for

just fifteen minutes. You are going to the barber's now, I take it. Well, you'll have your loan repaid before you get to the bay rum. That I promise, and I don't suppose you think me quite a thief."

Stites produced a pocketbook and none too willingly took from it three ten-dollar bills, crisp and new.

"Remember, Lawlor, that I trust you——" he began.

"For fifteen minutes. Might be called a short-time accommodation, eh, what? I know your chair, third from the door. I rather think you missed it when you turned me down, but that is your affair, not mine. See you later, and much obliged until you're better paid."

Mr. Stites, reclining in the barber's chair, could watch the hands of a large clock reflected in the mirror from the wall behind him. When twelve minutes had gone by—he had had to wait a little for his turn—he called himself a fool. By fourteen he had added in his mind a fitting prefix, and four seconds to fifteen he was ready with another. The bells of Trinity began to chime.

"Hold on!" he said. "That razor is like a hoe."

The barber stepped aside regretfully, and in his place, full imaged in the glass, stood Lawlor,

holding up his hand as runners against time were wont to do for judgment.

"There's your thirty, Stites," remarked the speculator, handing back the three green notes. "And here"—his left hand disclosed five others of a more attractive yellow—"is the hundred I was after."

"Lawlor," cried the broker, turning a half-lathered face toward his debtor, "I'll call it even if you'll tell me how you managed it."

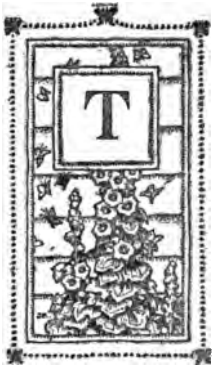
Lawlor with his right hand waved away temptation.

"By one of the oldest propositions known to finance," he said, "and the funny thing about it is it always works. Always something to learn, eh, what?"

"If you will let me try this one, Mr. Stites," broke in the barber, "I think you'll find it better."

In the mirror Mr. Lawlor might be seen to vanish through the door.

CHAPTER XI



THE Submarine, as everybody in the world of finance knows, or should know, occupies beneath the sidewalk of the Boulder Building a space devoted commonly to coal vaults in streets where every cubic inch of space above ground and below has not a rental value.

It is a café—or to be exact, a bar-room pure and simple; pure by reason of the spotless whiteness of its walls and simple in the artistic severity of its furniture. Mirrors on every hand extend its narrow limits to infinity; opening endless vistas wherein innumerable bartenders in white jackets set before countless well-dressed gentlemen potions of a cheery nature. The light which filters through the thick translucent sidewalk overhead is of a greenish deep-sea cast. The passers-by, seen looking upward, either suggest dark fishes frolicking in couples or swiftly moving turtles, as the case may be. But the nautical idea does not depend on light alone. The bar itself, known humorously as The Lifeboat, is supplied with loops of rope to

which the perishing may cling. The aneroid barometer—no well-appointed café flaunts a tactless clock—is framed within a steersman's wheel, and the sandwich counter is fashioned in the likeness of a dory.

Mr. Lawlor, bounding down the steep companionway, did not concern himself with any of these pleasing details, but made his way at once past thirsty financiers to a small door marked Chart Room, in what might have been the cheerful little vessel's stern, and there thrust in his head without the formality of a knock.

"Hello, Admiral!" he said by way of self-announcement.

"Hello, yourself!" replied the Admiral, in accents neither cordial nor repellent.

He was a short man and for a seafaring person rather broad of beam; so much so that the ample armchair which he occupied appeared to yield him little satisfaction. He sat upon the edge of it uncomfortably, with his short arms resting on his desk, to read the early edition of a lurid evening paper, and as he read he smoked a large and very black cigar without apparent relish.

"Come inside and shut the door," went on the Admiral, scarcely looking up. "I don't much care to have any of that bunch outside there butting in to tell me their troubles, pull me into their disputes, or borrow money."

Mr. Lawlor closed the door and took a seat upon a table, for the Chart Room (perhaps in order to discourage miscellaneous confidences) was not provided with a second chair. The Admiral pushed his paper from him and turning toward his visitor went on smoking, silent and unperturbed. There was an electric light bulb just above his head which showed him to possess a well-proportioned skull, brows not devoid of intellect and a Napoleonic nose. These were the Admiral's most agreeable features; his jaw was heavy and his jowls were fat, and his mouth so ridiculously small that the big cigar appeared to fit it like a cork. The face was without lines and without other expression than the inscrutable calm of those who trade on human weaknesses.

"Out with it!" he commanded, as through half-shut lids he surveyed his visitor from head to feet and back to head again.

"I want one hundred dollars," announced Mr. Lawlor, equally composed.

The Admiral first responded with an inward chuckle; then he asked:

"Want it for any special purpose or as a general proposition?"

"Special," replied the visitor, "or I should not come to you. It's no hard-luck story, though maybe I could tell one that would make you weep salt tears. I'm not to be turned out of my happy

little home; the mortgage on the old place is not about to be foreclosed; my children do not cry for bread, and if they did—" here Mr. Lawlor took the three crisp bills from his pocket and opened them on his knee—" I guess this would keep them quiet for a while."

The Admiral took deliberate observation of the bank notes and seemingly found their aspect reassuring.

"What do I get for my hundred?" he inquired, prudently, and the other man, pocketing his exhibit, made reply:

"You get a square deal either way. A share in something big if I make good, and if I don't, your money back . . . eh, what?"

The speculator and the man who dealt in human weaknesses looked at one another unperturbed. Under the code of No Man's Land, of which they both were citizens, the compact was as valid as though indentured, sealed and witnessed. The only question in the Admiral's mind concerned the luck of Mr. Lawlor rather than that gentleman's good judgment, and this he settled presently according to some law of probabilities best known to himself. All cards must win eventually if the deal goes on; all coins fall heads or tails so often on a million tosses. He waddled to a small safe in the corner while his visitor, slipping from the table, turned to

the charts upon the walls. The collection was in its way a famous one and depicted with great accuracy certain reefs that cautious navigators should avoid on sea or shore. But Lawlor stood in need of no such warnings; for even in dissipation high ideals served him in better stead than morality, and he was very willing to be interrupted in his studies.

"Here you are, partner," said the Admiral more heartily than he had spoken hitherto, "here is your hundred. I've got a hunch you're going to make good this time, but if you don't there's no use dropping in to tell me how it happened. Post-mortems make me peevish."

And this was all that passed between them. Their right hands met for an instant in the quick firm clutch that signifies blood brotherhood in No Man's Land, and with scarcely another word the visitor departed to "make good."

After Lawlor's brief colloquy with Mr. Stites, half lathered in the barber's chair, he bent his steps toward the shops in Nassau Street, where he bought collars and cravats in moderation and a straw hat with a natty band that made him ten years younger in the twinkling of an eye. He gave his old hat to an orange vendor and bought a pencil from a blind man, realising as he did so the satisfaction that a brand new full-length pencil gives its owner. In the instantaneous restau-

rant where he called for rare roast beef with browned potatoes on the side the waitress thought him worth an observation.

"Give me a mature gentleman every time," she whispered to her confidential chum.

While waiting he made neat calculations on the bill of fare, affixing to each item arbitrary zeroes for the sake of dignity. By this simple process of inflation he increased his capital a thousand fold and avoided the necessity of thinking in the paltry sums he so detested. He did not order coffee because the instantaneous cups were thick, and as good tobacco lay beyond his present means he refrained from smoking.

Lawlor's lodgings were—at this period of his career—a secret which shall be respected. He had no club, even in prosperity. To him new faces had the charm of daily papers, quickly skimmed and easily laid aside. Friends would have been too much like books which still maintain a claim to shelfroom after they have lost their novelty. He knew, however, of an upper Broadway caravansary with a club-like smoking-room where of an evening citizens of No Man's Land foregathered with an outward semblance of good fellowship. And it was into this retreat that Lawlor sauntered at the hour of ten, attracted by a strong desire to speak to somebody; hear a story; tell one; make a joke, and come

once more in contact with his kind. Happily one department of his wardrobe still remained as good as ever, for Lawlor looked his best in evening dress.

"There's life in the old dog yet," he told himself, nodding a friendly recognition at his own reflection in a mirror, and he was not displeased to find only one acquaintance present whose conversation might obstruct the wheels of chance. This was Mr. Bullivant, a gentleman whom he always met at varied intervals with pleasure and never parted from with keen regret. By trade a mining expert, revolutionist and promoter of vast enterprises, he had according to his own accounts but narrowly escaped a legal death in several minor countries. It presently appeared that he had lately come from Central Africa, where, as usual, his well-meant plans had met with unjust but vigorous opposition.

"I'd like to tell you—if I had the time—just how they cut me out of seven million sterling," he declared, and it occurred to Lawlor that he had rarely known a more wholesouled and genuine sort of fellow, really a most distinguished sort of fellow, especially in profile when his squint was not so noticeable.

He remembered also that at their last meeting eighteen months before he too had talked of millions sterling.

"What's your hurry?" Mr. Lawlor asked. "Let's sit down here and have a drink."

"Impossible, old chap," said Bullivant, who had at least picked up an idiom or so in Central Africa. "Can't do it, on my word. Truth is I'm down for a little after-dinner chinchin at the Bean Feast. But what's the matter with you coming along? I've got a taxi-cab outside; come on."

Mr. Lawlor laughed. The very name of taxi-cab was grateful to his ears as that of a familiar station on a homeward journey, and the suggestion seemed another indication of returning luck, stability and self-esteem.

"I don't believe I've thought about a Bean Feast since we met there last," he said.

"We'll miss the feed, of course, but my little turn comes late," went on Mr. Bullivant as he led the way toward the panting cab.

Mr. Lawlor, watching the city lights go by, experienced a sense of luxury that surprised himself, and chuckled when a shabby man stepped quickly back upon a crossing to avoid being run over. Meanwhile his host, who honestly believed his own affairs to be of an absorbing interest, poured forth a flood of confidences. The miscarriage of his Central African projects had left him in a quandary.

"It sounds ridiculous for an expert of my

standing," he said, "but really, I don't know what I shall pick up next. It will probably be my meteor in Arizona."

"That sounds all right to me," commented Lawlor amiably, as he crossed his legs. "How big is it?"

The expert cleared his throat.

"Oh, it's a regular asteroid, by thunder!" he declared. "Been lying there a billion years, waiting for someone to exploit it."

"What's it worth?" inquired Lawlor.

"Oh, about fifty or a hundred million. Solid iron ore, you understand, and only two hundred feet below the surface," explained the engineer.

"How the deuce did it ever get down there?" the other questioned, not unnaturally.

Mr. Bullivant laughed.

"You don't suppose that meteors when they strike bounce back and roll about like rubber balls?" he said.

Mr. Lawlor had not given much thought to the ways of meteors, and so confessed. Moreover, projects not his own were apt to bore him, and he was not sorry when they reached the old downtown hotel selected as the seat of revelry.

Here, as Mr. Bullivant had foreseen, they found the Bean Feast well advanced toward its final stage of easy informality. In the great

baronial hall of banqueting chairs were beginning to turn toward the speakers' platform, coffee had appeared, and already all of the gentlemen and not a few of the ladies had begun to smoke.

The scene was an effective one, almost theatrical. Beneath a heavy timbered ceiling, nearly lost in shadow, a decorous company sat broken into circles about many tables where the light of shaded candles fell on groups of women, pretty for the most part, and strong-featured men. For the Bean Feast was by no means the primitive function that its name implied. It was rather a foreshadowing of some coming social court where almost any one may enter once unchallenged and take the burden of a second welcome on himself. It was not Bohemia, nor was it Borderland, and neither did it represent an effort on the part of the Great Unrecognised to assert a right to recognition. It was Democracy expressed in terms of deliberate and premeditated dinner, and the watchword of Democracy has ever been "Make Good."

Mr. Lawlor, anxious only not to thwart in any way the will of Fate, shook hands with the first man who offered to shake hands with him. He did not know the man, and, as it presently developed, neither did the man know him. It had been a case of mistaken identity, and explanations followed, exchange of affabilities and remarks upon

the proneness of one's memory to play one false. The financier, ever glad to drift into a new acquaintance, found himself a little later received on probation between the buxom wife of the mistaken one and another lady equally gracious, and perceived that Fate was really doing rather well by him. Six others at the table had accorded him a welcome and there had been a general murmuring of names to which no one had paid much attention.

"We like the Bean Feast best of all the dinners," remarked the stouter lady, opening as she spoke the gold box with a ruby clasp which held her favourite brand of cigarettes, "because it is not in the hands of a clique. Now there is the Morning Glory simply being killed by poets. I'm fond of poetry, crazy about it, in its proper place, but I can't stand having it crammed down my throat."

Mr. Lawlor quite agreed with her.

The thinner lady held that one should cultivate a taste for poetry; without its influence life was apt to grow prosaic.

Mr. Lawlor's acquiescence in this higher view was mingled with a vague regret that Fate had not made so sympathetic a spirit's mortal frame a little fatter.

During the gentle flow of confidences which accompanied the next musical number on the

programme, he learned that his companions' names were Mrs. Duff and Mrs. Barr, and that his own was for all necessary purposes Lawlor, and further that the Duffs enjoyed a Bradstreet rating, and the Barrs possessed a motor car. Mr. Barr was ill at home, dangerously ill, his wife appeared to think. When Lawlor's turn for declarations came he owned himself a widower and confessed to a daughter. And here the conversation was suspended by the appearance on the platform of one Benny Wales.

"Wouldn't the very sight of him make you laugh?" cried Mrs. Duff.

"I hope he sings 'The Auto and the Tram,'" said Mrs. Barr, and by good fortune Benny Wales sang "The Auto and the Tram."

"'Oh, a street car loved an automobile
With a passion true and tender,
From the top of her trailing trolley wheel
To the tip of her dainty fender.
And she wasn't downcast to find him fast
But kept her love in abeyance,
Tho' she commonly cried as he went past—
This silly little blond conveyance—
'Oh, Auto, beloved Auto, believe your little Tram is
true.
Tho' Auto, she had not ought to, she'd leave her
happy track for you.
She'd slip her trolley and burn her fuse
To go, ho! ho! where ever you choose,
From Timbuctoo to Zanzibar
With her great big masculine motor car.'"

The air was rather catchy and the Feasters still hummed the chorus:

"Tim—buc—too—Zan—zi—bar,"

when Mr. Bullivant arose to make good with his remarks on Africa. The coincidence might not have seemed a wholly happy one to a less ready man.

Mr. Bullivant began by saying that the song recalled to him an Apingi chief whose faith was such that he could even believe that Providence meant well in creating womankind. Now, of course, the song suggested nothing of the sort, and this anecdote was no more than a ruse to lure his listeners on to facts in ambush. From womankind to diamonds was but a step, and from thence to diamond mines another.

Mr. Bullivant had himself discovered a vein of diamonds which had proved the richest in the world.

"Ah!" from the Bean Feasters in triumphant chorus.

But the fruits of this discovery had been taken from him by a greedy, grasping and rapacious Government.

Groans from the Bean Feasters expressive of deep sympathy.

"But that won't happen to me again," de-

clared Mr. Bullivant, playfully. "And now I'll tell you all a secret."

"Good!" From several Bean Feasters, moved by loyalty to keep alive the flagging interest.

"If ever any one of you," continued Mr. Bullivant, becoming impressive, "should happen to pick up anywhere a piece of flexible sandstone, buy the land you find it on. Buy it, I say, no matter what it costs, and telegraph to me."

"We will!" they cried in unison and with a heartiness that savoured somewhat of derision. And Mr. Lawlor with his new long pencil scribbled "flexible sandstone" on his cuff, winning thereby the reputation of a humourist.

"Our front steps are made of sandstone," giggled Mrs. Duff, "but flexible?—You sit down hard on one of them and find out for yourself."

Mr. Lawlor, perceiving that the liqueur glasses stood in need of replenishing, winked toward the waiter.

Without the aid of stimulant, his spirits had been rising steadily. He found the company exhilarating; not Mrs. Duff and Mrs. Barr especially, but the company at large. Other tables harboured other ladies, younger, fairer, perhaps as affable. The lights, the laughter, and the music were intoxication to the man who but a few hours earlier had seen the Bread Line and the Salvation Army's soup kitchen loom up as

horrid possibilities, and the diamond story filled his mind with wild, unreasonable hopes. The foolish words of Bullivant, "Buy the land, no matter what it costs," now seemed to portend a message sent to him directly from some supernatural source.

Presently Mr. Duff appeared, dragging the speaker affectionately by the arm to receive the compliments that were his due, and the discovery of a common acquaintance caused a pleasant ripple of excitement.

"It's funny how you millionaires draw naturally together," remarked the expert, laughing.

"For mutual protection against promoters," retorted Mr. Duff with a knowing wink toward the company. "What do you suppose he has been trying to rope me into? A scheme for digging in the earth for stars. Next thing we shall have a company for shooting aerial potatoes."

The speaker laughed uproariously at his own humour, and from the manner in which Mr. Bullivant received the jest Mr. Lawlor inferred that Mr. Duff must be very rich indeed.

"Ah, you may laugh!" he said to prolong the chaff, "but we have something bigger yet which you shan't have a smell of—eh, Lawlor?"

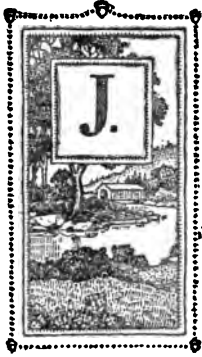
"I'm certain Mr. Lawlor wouldn't be so mean," volunteered Mrs. Duff, and Mrs. Barr put in a playful claim to be included. Surely the gods

of chance were speaking through the mouths of men.

“Bullivant,” Lawlor whispered to his friend at parting, “if I can put you into something really big, would you have leisure to take hold of it?”

“Sure!” replied the expert. “That’s just what I’m looking for.”

CHAPTER XII



BANBRIDGE CUTTERWOOD, the genial chauffeur of S. Stites of New York, who is stopping at the Walton House, says Beatoun County roads are fine. 'Rah for old Beatoun. S. Stites is here on business."

The *Walton Mercury* is quoted here in simple justice to J. Banbridge Cutterwood, who otherwise would figure in these pages only as the Porcupine, a name for which Miss Beatoun must be held responsible. But a more observant mind than Mopsie's might have derived profit from the study of a type in process of formation. Aunt Lydia had more discernment. She it was who spoke of Mr. Stites and his chauffeur as Man and Superman, giving full credit to her favourite author for the phrase. She also saw a danger of type suicide in Superman's perpetual cigarettes, and broached the subject once to Man quite seriously.

"By Jove, I should not dare to interfere," was Mr. Stites' reply. "He understands the car while I know less and less about it every day."

There were times when this superior wisdom weighed upon the broker; times when he would have welcomed the intelligence that some vital function of the red car was temporarily deranged. But it was at such times that each separate valve and sprocket performed its duty best, obliging him to steal through lanes and alleys like a truant boy to reach the footpath along the Roundabout to Beatoun's Bridge.

It was on one of these rare days of freedom that Mr. Stites, not without an occasional glance toward the distant highway—for the Porcupine had eyes behind his goggles and an inquiring mind behind his eyes—set forth with heart and soul as unshadowed as the fields he trod. In order to avoid too long exposure to the sun, he made his first objective point a grove of willows at the water's edge, and there it was that he came upon a fisherman employed to all appearance in casting flies.

Now, aside from the blinding brilliancy of the morning, the angler's obvious lack of aptness in his gentle art, and the fact that Roundabout harboured no fish of sporting habits, there was nothing surprising in the sight. True, patent leather walking pumps and gaudy hosiery accord but ill with large rural straw hats, and fishing is not often done in gloves. But Wall Street is no school for such conventions, and

there must have been something else about the figure on the bank to bring young Mr. Stites to such a sudden halt; something at once familiar and perplexing; something that caused the broker to imagine for a moment a large locust in the meadow actually engaged in printing Stock Exchange quotations on a paper tape.

"Tick, tick, ticketty tick!" the locust sang. "U. P. one-half—three-quarters—seven-eighths!"

Stites shaped his palms into a megaphone.

"Why, hello, Lawlor!" he called out. "What the devil brings you here?"

Lawlor's surprise, if less sincere, was no less vehement.

"Great Scott!" he called back, with a flourish of his rod which sent the fly high up into the willow boughs. "How did you ever get so far from the Boulder Building?"

When the two men had shaken hands, he added:

"I should have as soon thought of meeting George Washington from the Treasury steps," and Mr. Stites laughed heartily.

Then followed explanations of a general nature. The broker muttered words to the effect that motor-trips were said to be of benefit to patients suffering from overwork. He found it a great relief to get away from business even for a

week; to cut loose from society and clubs; in fact, to come to such a place as Walton without the faintest shadow of a purpose beyond a casual dropping in upon his old acquaintance, Colonel Wixom. Mr. Lawlor quite agreed that rest was good for every man who could afford the luxury, and spoke of his own affairs without reserve. As he mentioned Mrs. Dacer his voice took on a note of tenderness.

"Louisa and I are all that is left of our stock," he said, forgetting Agnes altogether in an excess of brotherly emotion.

"You may break, you may shatter the vase if you will,
But a brother's a brother for good or for ill'—

eh, what?" he rattled off so glibly that Mr. Stites believed him quoting. "And where are you bound for now?" he inquired.

"Oh, nowhere in particular—just for a stroll. One of my front shoes gave out yesterday."

Mr. Lawlor laughed, but refrained from giving breath to whatever was on his mind.

"Yours is a red car, isn't it?" he asked.

"Yes, rather red," admitted Mr. Stites.

"Ah, quite so, quite so!" chirped the financier as one who cunningly puts two and two together. "We live just opposite the Colonel's gate," he added, and the cheek of Mr. Stites grew like unto his car.

"What of it?" he demanded.

"Oh, nothing," Lawlor answered, turning his attention to the entangled fly. "Ever fish?" he inquired.

"Not when I can help it."

"You miss a lot."

"What do you catch?"

"Nothing, so far."

"Well, what do you expect to catch?" Mr. Stites was ready to move on.

"Oh, anything that bites. I'm not particular." Mr. Lawlor stuck the butt of his fishing rod in the soft mud in a most unsportsmanlike manner, and proceeded to readjust the fly, discoursing cheerfully meanwhile. "Odd, isn't it?" he said, "both been here nearly a week and never met before. Of course, I've heard you spoken of, but never for a moment thought it could be you. Imagined it was some country sport of the same name, making up to that little Beatoun girl. Natural, wasn't it? Eh, what?" Mr. Lawlor, having plucked a most enticing feather from his fly, introduced a cheerful oath, and then went on: "You'll soon find out we are a queer lot down here. Never gossip. Hold ourselves above that sort of thing. Rather think we're some folks, being to the manor born and just a bit stuck up."

He twitched his line until the pole, refusing

longer to remain erect, came down upon his hat, which might have rolled into the stream but for Stites' befriending foot. The tackle had become so hopelessly entangled that no one but its legal owner, Peleg Prout, could ever set it right again.

"Deuce take the thing!" exclaimed the fisherman. "Come back and lunch with me, old chap. There will be just ourselves—Loo and a young friend of Loo's, a gifted girl, and Madame Triboulet, of the French nobility. That's all, unless the little Beatoun trips across the road—she's always welcome—or her legislative cousin drops in, in a friendly way, to help me smoke my perfectos."

Lawlor's patronage was insufferable; if it was his wish to give a cordial invitation and at the same time make refusal certain, that object was attained.

"Don't think," he went on, still more warmly, "that we old residents hold ourselves aloof from those who have the sense to take us as they find us. No, indeed! My sister Loo will make you as welcome to her humble *poulet sauté* or *blanquette de veau aux pointes d'asperges* as though they were—um!—ah!—something very different. Eh, what?—She'll make you feel at home right off, just as she would any friend of mine."

"You're very kind, I'm sure," replied the bro-

ker, "but I shall not be able to lunch with you to-day."

"Sorry!" said Lawlor. "You would be sure to like the Countess—grandmother second cousin to Louis Philippe and Napoleon Bonaparte and the whole royal bunch. Better change your mind. Ever happen to meet the little Beatoun?"

"I have had the pleasure of meeting Miss Beatoun often," the younger man replied.

"Of course you have!" cried Mr. Lawlor. A very little practice had enabled him to approach his own conception of a bluff and hearty country squire. "And tell me, would you call her pretty?" he added with a great show of interest. "Down here we're all so fond of her that we sometimes fear we may be prejudiced."

"I'd rather not discuss Miss Beatoun, if it's all the same to you," returned Mr. Stites.

"Quite right, quite right," assented Lawlor with a touch of sadness. "Poor little Mopsie! But she has a heart of gold."

"Lawlor," retorted Mr. Stites, at last badgered into a betrayal of his feelings, "please understand that I consider Miss Beatoun one of the most attractive young women who has ever given me the honour of her acquaintance."

"Well, don't get on your ear about it," Lawlor cried, and broke into an open-hearted laugh.

"Come along, if you're on your way to the Bridge. I've had enough of fishing for one day."

So saying, he linked his arm in that of Mr. Stites, and rather forced the pace along the grassy path.

"I wish that you would do me a little favour," he began again, and paused in order that the idea might penetrate his hearer's mind, awakening therein feelings of mistrust and doubt. "It's not that twenty-five you refused me the last time we met," he went on, while the breath of Mr. Stites came easier, "no, thank Heaven, I'm no longer in financial straits"—Stites drew in several lungfuls of invigorating air,—“but now if you have any influence with Miss B——”

"But I haven't—not a particle. I'm merely an acquaintance."

"Yes, but an intelligent acquaintance, and as such you can advise her to sell me her interest in Heartbreak Hill."

Mr. Stites' arm gave an involuntary twitch which his companion did not seem to notice.

"What the deuce do you want of it?" he demanded, shaking himself free.

They were in the open meadows now, knee-deep in daisies, timothy, and mint, and the way lay clear before them for a mile to Heartbreak and the Bridge. Presently they came to a barbed

fence through which it was necessary to crawl, one holding up a wire for the other to pass under. It was not until this difficulty had been overcome that Lawlor answered.

"Of course, I'd have no use for it myself, but I have a friend;—foolish chap; lots of money;—got a wild idea about being buried on a mountain top. Crazy notion, isn't it? Bubbles in his boiler, eh, what? Saw a picture on a postal card and thinks the place would suit him so well that he's going to send down an architect to look it over."

"Have you made an offer?" Mr. Stites inquired.

"Offer? No. What would be the use? They won't sell to the Trolley Company for twenty thousand, and my man would not care to go much higher. Now, I can't blame them for not wanting a hurdy-gurdy, shoot-the-shoots, and leap-the-leaps pandemonium under their noses. But a nice clean mausoleum, something artistic and refined, would be quite different, and if a friend in whose good judgment they had confidence were to point out the advantages——"

"Lawlor," the broker interrupted, "if you should get that property for twenty thousand, and turn it over to the Trolley Company for—say twenty-five—you would be making just five thousand dollars, wouldn't you?"

"Sure!" answered Mr. Lawlor. "That's arithmetic."

"Well," pursued the other, "can you give me any reason whatsoever why I should help you to do so?"

"Not a one," admitted Lawlor with a cheerful laugh. "I only wanted to find out how you felt toward me; now I know."

"And as for this imaginary friend of yours——" Mr. Stites was beginning.

"Forget him!" said the other, promptly, and a silence followed, broken only by the whip of daisy stalks against their boots and the whir of grasshoppers flushed at every step. The day was growing sultry as noon came on, and the grazing cattle had begun to seek the shade of trees.

"Lawlor," said the broker, after a period of cogitation, "if you have been nearly a week in this measly, gossiping, one-horse settlement, no doubt you have at least a strong suspicion of what brings me here?"

"I'm not so dead to romance that I can't put in a guess!" replied the financier.

"Leave romance out of it," cried Mr. Stites. "I'm here, as you know very well, to buy that cussed little rubbish heap myself."

Mr. Lawlor did not take the trouble to feign surprise at this announcement.

"And what do you want of it?" he asked.
"Another case of crazy friend?"

"That I don't know," declared the broker, coming to a halt. "I know only that we have a bona fide order to buy. Nobody has looked at the thing for a hundred years, and now all of a sudden new bidders seem to spring up in every direction. It's all a mystery to me, I confess."

"It needn't be," rejoined the financier.
"Haven't you noticed often when some dead stock on the list takes on a sudden spurt how the whole crowd goes tumbling in to get hold of it? That doesn't mean the stuff is worth a cent; it means that there has been some clever tipping going on. If I were you I'd gracefully retire . . . quit the game . . . drop out."

"Drop out?"

"That's what I said. Go home, and take your red car with you. This is not a proposition for a conservative investment house, and the way you are going about it you will get neither the mountain nor the romance."

"It seems to me you're getting damned impertinent," observed Mr. Stites, taking up the trail again.

"Maybe," Lawlor admitted, "but I'll tell you this, my boy: romance and business mix about as well as ice cream soda and bottled stout."

"I strongly suspect," returned the broker, un-

perturbed, "that you are simply trying to find out how keen I am. This much I'll admit," he went on, "I'll either buy that hill or——"

A fitting antithesis did not come to him at once, so Mr. Lawlor carried out the sentence with a whistled strophe of the Wedding March.

They had reached the bridge, and though the path continued on beneath the covered span to follow Roundabout through Heartbreak woods, it was also possible to reach the highway by means of rough steps in the stone abutment.

"Here's where we part," said Lawlor, cheerily. "I'm going to thrash the stream a little farther up." He had lost the last feathers of his fly a half mile behind, and his trailing line had dwindled to a miserable yard or so, but he clung to the angling fiction, and permitted Mr. Stites to climb the steps alone. "We must meet soon again for another little chat," he said, and the answer (if he heard aright) will scarcely bear repeating.

Once sure that Stites had crossed the bridge and entered at the Wixom gate, the angler threw away his useless tackle and made straight for Heartbreak woods. At first he moved with casual steps; took off his hat and plucked a random flower here and there. But presently, secure from observation in the cool green shade, his manner changed. He became alert, and in-

stead of flowers, gathered fragment after fragment of the broken rock that lay beneath the ferns and undergrowth, and every fragment he submitted to a singular test. He tried to bend it with his fingers; he tried to bend it with both hands across his knee; he stood on it and tried to bend it with his weight; he pounded one against another till it showed its brittleness by breaking. There was none, not one, that the liveliest imagination might consider flexible in the least degree. Then Lawlor tried a new experiment. He came back to the edge of Roundabout and scooped up handfuls of fine gravel from its bed, making a miner's basin of his large straw hat to wash the grit away. White little stones were left, and black and grey little stones, and red, but not a golden nugget; not a diamond of the smallest size; not so much as a cheap freshwater pearl to reward his labours and repay him for his hat. Then Mr. Lawlor, sitting on a mossy stone, cursed Heartbreak Hill with curses loud and deep.

"You're fooling us!" he cried. "You've set us all to guessing riddles like a blank infernal Sphinx! And I wouldn't give a peanut for the whole of you—eh, what?"

CHAPTER XIII



R. SAMMY STITES was cheerfully attired in flannels; white for the most part, but enlivened here and there with touches of the blue forget-me-not, once thought to grow for happy lovers; details omitted from the preceding chapter because they made no impression whatsoever on the mind of Mr. Lawlor. The broker had evidently missed his bearings on entering the garden by an unfamiliar gate, for when first observed he was astray among the early pear trees, whose branches, heavy with their load of ripening fruit, made playful passes at his hat.

Mopsie and her French friend, Madame Tri-boulet, were cosily established on the Wixom back veranda, out of reach, as they supposed, of casual morning visitors, and yet within an easy call should anything agreeable happen. The elder lady—in a large straw armchair—was engaged in doing nothing very gracefully, and the younger—seated sidewise in a low-swung hammock—occupied her hands in shelling peas.

"Yes, my dear," Madame was saying, "I am going soon to make one of my little journeys, and I shall start perhaps on Monday."

"One of those mysterious little expeditions that take you away for two days every month," observed Miss Beatoun, as she aimed a peapod at the nose of Bill, asleep, and failed to score.

"Every *two* months," Madame corrected. "I should go oftener if these railway tickets did not eat the money. My friend is what you call a 'Shut-In.'"

"Some day your friend may get well enough to return your visits," suggested Mopsie, making the most of the Frenchwoman's meagre confidence.

"Ah, that will not be soon," replied Madame.

Concerning much more personal matters she was frankness itself. Mopsie knew all about her monetary affairs, her clothes, her aspirations, and the secrets of her hair. She knew that Madame's widowhood had in some way come about through salad oil, the mildest of commodities, yet capable of untold mischief in the marts of trade. There had been speculation, loss, heart failure, death, and Mopsie sometimes fancied the mysterious "Shut-In" to be in truth poor Triboulet himself, at last at rest in alien earth, his little griefs and woes and disappointments most effectually shut out.

"It is very sad," she sighed, and even if there had been no interruption the subject would have dropped.

"Woof!" observed Bill, aroused from dreams to glare into the orchard, each separate hair along his brindled spine erect.

"Lie down, sir, and be quiet," commanded the one voice that Bill obeyed without a question.

"My faith, who have we here?" exclaimed Madame, whose chair permitted her an unobstructed view across the balustrade, while Mopsie from her low seat tried without success to peer between the honeysuckle leaves.

"It must be Peleg Prout," she said.

"No," cried Madame, too fond of surprises to prolong the guessing. "It is none other than the flamboyant one."

"Surely not Mr. Stites?"

The Frenchwoman gave a silvery laugh, albeit soft and tempered by discretion.

"Who else dresses for the cakewalk so early in the day?" she asked with a graceful flourish of a large and yellow carrot that she purposed bearing home to her bird. In her supple hand the vegetable might have been a fan, a lorgnette, or a vial of smelling salts.

"Now, please don't run away," Miss Beatoun pleaded.

"But one does not come from Walton all the way to speak with stupid foreigners," Madame protested.

"Bother! Who cares why he comes?" exclaimed Miss Beatoun, assiduously shelling peas, an occupation, by the way, uniting grace and skill with sweet suggestion of domestic thrift; a task that brings the pink blood to the finger-tips, provides an almost perfect setting for the hands, and, above all, quickens in beholders gentle vegetarian desires. To watch Miss Beatoun shelling peas was to think ennobling thoughts and pray kind Heaven for an invitation to come back to dinner.

"Do tell me if my feet are showing much," begged Mopsie, and Madame Triboulet made answer:

"Just enough."

But by that time it was too late to rectify defects, for Mr. Stites, having avoided with success a clothesline, several infant chickens and an up-turned rake, now stood smiling on the gravel path, his eyes upon the level of the upper step.

"Oh, do come right up, please!" cried Mopsie, moved to urgent hospitality by horrid doubts as to the precise significance of "just enough" in France. "Come up at once," she insisted, and Mr. Stites obeyed.

"Don't rise, I beg of you," he said.

"I couldn't if I tried," she said, holding out a cool, pod-polished hand above her yellow bowl.

Bill sniffed a dog's contempt for alien heels, and Madame Triboulet beamed Gallic pleasure at the formal introduction to a new acquaintance. It was not difficult for Mr. Stites to identify her with the lady, Duchess or Countess, Bourbon or Bonaparte, of Lawlor's conversation.

"Will you have some ice-water?" Mopsie nodded toward a jug and glasses on a little table.

"Thanks very much. I will." Mr. Stites refreshed himself, first making sure that neither of the ladies was athirst, and then sank down most willingly into the deep hollow of a rattan chair.

"I'm afraid you'll not be comfortable," said Mopsie. "My cousin calls that chair the——"

"My faith! a bee!" cried Madame Triboulet in the nick of time, for "egg-cup" was the name that Sidney's fancy had suggested for the chair, and Mopsie's confidence in her tribal chief was apt at times to carry her too far.

"Delightful!" murmured Mr. Stites, politely. "I'd not get up again for a house and lot. It's quite a walk from Walton here, when one is out of training."

"You tell me that you walked?" Mopsie was overcome with horror at the bare suggestion.

"You must be awfully tired." Her voice expressed sincere concern.

"Oh, not a bit," protested Mr. Stites, but it was noticeable that he threw one foot across a flannel knee with evident relief, and Mopsie could not help observing his shoes, which were new and tight. She also perceived the moiety of an early pear adherent to his instep, and debated if it would be tact to call attention to the circumstance.

"If you had come a little earlier," she said, deciding to let well enough alone, "you might have helped me shell the peas."

"But how about peeling the potatoes?" Mr. Stites demanded, playfully. "I'm the child-wonder at potatoes."

"Woof!" put in Bill, meaning, no doubt, "The gift of speech is nothing much to boast of, after all."

"Too late," Miss Beatoun laughed.

"But I should like to be in the picture," went on Mr. Stites, with an envious glance at Madame Triboulet's carrot. "Do please let me do something useful."

"It would be useful to amuse us with your adventures on the way," suggested Madame with her sweetest smile.

Mr. Stites composed his head against the chair as one who finds himself in very pleasant com-

pany. A yellow bee made several circuits of his foot, and came at last to rest upon the pear.

"Oddly enough, I ran across an acquaintance in the meadows," Mr. Stites began. "A Mr. Lawlor——"

"Ah, yes."

The ladies both knew Mr. Lawlor, and apparently regarded him with no disfavour.

"Good sort of chap. Immensely clever," commented Mr. Stites, knowing full well that every word in favour of the absent counts two in favour of one's self, especially when creating first impressions. He was also wise enough to shun all patronising mention of the scenery, and expressed no great surprise that Walton should have telephones and electric lights.

"How do you like the Walton House?" asked Mopsie as she snapped a pod, and this question he divined to be a test.

Stites answered with a deep sepulchral groan which made both ladies laugh and opened up at once a fine perennial vein of humour. Sinking still deeper in the egg-cup, he wagged his foot and so dislodged the bee, who buzzed away to bear glad tidings to its young companions. There is no real reason why discomfort should be thought amusing; the elder nations do not find it so, but, after all, who ever emigrated to a country where they do not laugh? Mopsie laughed

because she liked to laugh; Madame because she knew her teeth showed just enough, and Stites because he had discovered in himself an unsuspected talent for narration.

"When I asked for a writing table in my room," he declared, "they told me if I wanted all the comforts of home I had better marry and be done with it."

The bee returned, and with it came a second and a third.

"Ah, such impertinence!" exclaimed Madame.

"Some of the Walton girls are awfully nice," mused Mopsie seriously, and bit her lip to keep from idiotic merriment. A fourth bee and a fifth had registered on Stites' hospitable shoe.

"But I should be given time to look them over," he protested. "Meanwhile, all my letters must remain unanswered.—By the way," he added, "how far do they consider Walton to extend?"

"Oh, all the way to Roundabout," said Mopsie. "It is only Beatoun township when you cross the bridge."

Miss Beatoun's cheeks, bent low above her work, had turned a very pretty pink. The bees, now grown in number to half a score, were making after-dinner plans for recreation.

"I mean to start a club," went on the broker, all in happy ignorance of threatened danger,

"and I shall call it the Crusoe Club, because, you see, it is to have a membership of one."

"I hope that you will give a Ladies' Day," said Mopsie, flushing violently. The bees had formed themselves in single file and seemed about to make an upward movement.

"I shall if Madame la Comtesse will act as chaperone," vowed Mr. Stites, well pleased, for he had been on the lookout for an occasion to pronounce the title.

Madame held up a deprecating carrot.

"She must, indeed she must," cried Mopsie, scarcely knowing what she said, for the head of the advancing column had disappeared beneath a flannel arch. Till now she had been hoping against hope that something would occur to cause a movement of the broker's foot.

"It's awfully good of you to back me up," said Mr. Stites, but still his attitude remained unchanged, and still the pageant moved. The time for action could no longer be delayed.

"A glass of water!" Mopsie breathed. "And please, please, please be quick."

Then Mr. Stites arose; arose to make a strange grimace; to execute a species of barbaric dance; to cry:

"I rather think I have been bitten by a snake."

Madame sprang up and mounted to her chair.

"A snake! a snake! Who will save me from the snake?"

Miss Beatoun also rose, but at the cost of half the peas.

"It's all my fault. I saw them, but I did not know exactly what to do."

"Mon Dieu! How many did you see?"

"I don't know—ten or twelve, I think."

With Spartan fortitude the broker ceased to dance; Bill barked. Peleg Prout, attracted by the noise, came from the front garden with a hoe; the Colonel hurried from his study, Aunt Lydia from the clutch of Bernard Shaw.

"I'm almost sure," confessed Miss Beatoun, "that I noticed several bees near Mr. Stites' foot."

And really further explanations seemed unnecessary.

"A bee!" exclaimed Aunt Lydia, rather disappointed.

"A snake!" asserted Madame from her perch.

"In case of doubt," put in the Colonel, "it is always well to take a dose of snake-bite antidote."

"The decanter is on the table," said his wife, "and so will lunch be soon."

But Mr. Stites stood in no need of anything decanters hold. It would have been enough for

him to break the Wixom bread and taste the Wixom salt in Mopsie's presence; to sit beside her at the table;—even opposite; to sniff the steam arising from ambrosial peas her hand had shelled. But it was not to be—at least not that particular afternoon.

"I should like to very much; by Jove, I'd love to——" he began, and stopped.

A sudden change came over him, a sinister change affecting every lineament, and coincident therewith a strain of uncouth music might be heard proceeding from the Walton road, like a low moan at first, but mounting in a weird crescendo to a Banshee wail which echoed and re-echoed from the rocks of Heartbreak Hill.

"I can't—I really can't—I'd love to, but I can't," he muttered as one doomed, for in his ears had blown the siren horn of Nemesis, and he knew that the Porcupine had run his prey to earth.

It was something of a disappointment to Aunt Lydia, whose feeding instincts were abnormally developed, and to the Colonel, who took pardonable pride in a certain private stock of snake-bite remedy. Madame regretted the departure of so worthy a young gentleman, and even Mopsie would have been glad to make some slight atonement for her ill-advised behaviour in connection with the bees. But with mesmeric gog-

gles bent upon the door, there was nothing for it but to say good-bye, and Mr. Stites departed 'dismally enough.

"I did not get your message till a while ago," observed the Porcupine.

"What message?" Mr. Stites inquired.

"Your telephone message—saying where you were and telling me to come after you."

"Oh, yes. All right. Go ahead."

The broker slammed himself a prisoner in the tonneau, dropped into a corner, and took off his hat. It would have been evident to a duller mind than his that Lawlor had been playing him a trick; a mean, despicable and shabby trick. It was probable that Lawlor was that moment laughing at him from behind some Dacer curtains. Lawlor was a knave, had always been one, would always be one till his knavish death and knavish burial at someone's else expense.

"Damn Lawlor!" he remarked aloud.

"Beg pardon?" said the Porcupine.

"I didn't speak," said Mr. Stites.

Lawlor was a fool. Who but a fool would pronounce business and romance incompatible, when the two had been sire and dam to every chief event in history? Lawlor was not a fool. He simply wished to forestall opposition to his own nefarious schemes. He knew the mystery of Heartbreak well enough; he knew the Hill

was worth a fortune to its lucky owner. Ah, Mopsie! if it should not be a million, but a half or even a quarter of a million, that one blush of yours might compensate for nearly all the difference. That single blush, that came and lingered just before the bees.

"Damn bees!" said Mr. Stites aloud.

"Beg your pardon?" said the Porcupine.

"I didn't speak," said Mr. Stites.

The Porcupine, who, when the road ahead lay clear and unobstructed rarely spoke, maintained a stolid silence all the way to Walton. He seemed to require moving objects close at hand to stimulate his conversational powers. In solitude he was as one who sleeps, but let a load of hay appear, a swift, onrushing car, a drove of sheep, and burning thoughts began at once to seek expression. To-day, the Walton High Street being comparatively filled with traffic, he turned half way about to open a discussion, leaving the red car largely to its own devices.

"I found an office for you," he began, "a place to write your letters; and I guess it has got to suit you because it's the only one in town that is large and completely furnished and ready to move into right away, and can be had at your own price for just a month. It's got three windows looking out on High Street, and three more round the corner, and it's only one flight up.

There's an inner room and an outer room fixed up all fine and daisy with rocking-chairs and sofas and running water and electric lights, and there's a phonograph that you can have the use of, and about a hundred last year's magazines, and Byron's Works, and a stereoscope with views of Paris, France——"

The red car made a graceful swoop about four mules who drew a load of railway ties, and skillfully avoided a steam roller coming in the opposite direction.

"It's got an electric fan, and fly-screens," said the Porcupine.

"That sounds all right to me," said Mr. Stites, a little absently, for his mind was still upon the bees.

The red car missed the hind wheel of the doctor's buggy standing before the drug store by three-quarters of an inch.

"It *is* all right," rejoined the Porcupine. "It's got an Oriental rug, and genuine oil paintings on the walls, and a real bronze statuette of an antique ancient goddess."

"It must be fine," said Mr. Stites, beginning to suspect his chauffeur of indulging in some drug provocative of dreams.

The car bore down upon a team of restive colts, but changed its purpose in the nick of time.

"It *is* fine," said the Porcupine. "It's got a

silver-plated water-cooler, and a glass case full of imported butterflies."

"It must be great," admitted Mr. Stites, uttering his last remaining adjective.

"It *is* great," said the chauffeur, shutting off his speed and bringing the car to a skilful stop at the sidewalk. "You can see for yourself, for here it is."

"Where?" asked Mr. Stites, and following the direction indicated by a thumb, he read, repeated in three windows just above his head, the sign: "Walton Painless Dental Parlours."

"Great Scott!" exclaimed the broker, "I can't write letters in a dentist's waiting-room."

"You don't have to," explained the grinning Porcupine. "The fun of it is that the dentist broke his arm this morning falling through a cellar door. So you can have the whole plant to yourself for thirty days at ten per——"

"Ten per what?"

"Per week, of course, and it's a cinch."

"But——" faltered Mr. Stites.

"But nothing," said the Porcupine. "It's just the joint you want. Put a sign on the door telling the customers to go away, and there you are—lonesome as an onion-eater at a kissing sociable."

"I don't believe I care for it," said Mr. Stites, recalling his bright visions of the Crusoe Club.

"Get out and take a look at it," the Porcupine insisted. "Here's your key. The coloured fellow from the drug store will sweep you out every morning, and you can drop around and pay the dentist when convenient."

"You don't mean to tell me you have taken the place already?" demanded Mr. Stites.

"Surest thing you know," replied the Porcupine.

CHAPTER XIV



It was a custom well-established for the Beatouns to assemble on the first day of each week for tribal consultation; a custom nothing but the chieftain's absence ever interfered with. Often these meetings had been stormy, sometimes riotous, but generally they were orderly gatherings, and as much a part of Sunday as the bells of Walton, or the winding of the eight-day Wixom clocks. The order of exercises was very simple; a brief address from the over-lord upon some theme of common interest was followed by debate free and open to the tribe.

Upon one particular Sabbath afternoon the theme of general interest chosen was Mr. Sammy Stites. The tribe, which had for unknown reasons arranged its hair after the fashion of its own great-grandmother, sat supposedly listening in the middle of the largest parlour sofa, a book caught up at random in its hands, while the chieftain supplemented his address with an

occasional afterthought as he strode about the room. Through the open windows floated now and again the sound of singing from the school-house where the elect of Beatoun's Bridge attended afternoon service, guided by the Walton rector, and from whence at times the high soprano of Aunt Lydia, like good Ben Adhem's name, led all the rest.

"Hell's foundations quiver,"

she announced at the same moment that Mr. Sidney Beatoun in his progress overturned a chair.

"The man is evidently half-witted," he was saying. "A dangerous idiot. He keeps that lumbering car of his in evidence every moment of the day, either in front of the Walton House or snorting here before the door."

"It doesn't snort," protested Mopsie. "It's a steamer."

The over-lord stood still to gaze upon the tribe.

"How do you know what it is?" he asked with awful calm.

"He told me," was the humble answer.

"Did he, indeed? I wonder at you, Mopsie!"

Mopsie gave vent to an impatient laugh and stole a glance into her random book, which—being but a catalogue of seeds—afforded scanty inspiration.

"I didn't know that it was wrong to speak of steam," she ventured.

"Why should you speak to him of anything?"

"You can't expect one to be absolutely dumb when a person comes to see one."

"Why should he come to see you?"

"Because he likes to, I suppose—and, anyway, he hasn't been here for two whole days; he's getting settled."

Sidney picked up the chair, and having righted it, stood with both hands resting on its back.

"Settled!" he repeated with a touch of scorn. "Settled where? In a Painless Dental Parlour. Who ever heard of anything so imbecile?"

Mopsie laughed.

"But don't you think it awfully funny?" she demanded.

"Not in the least," was the reproving answer. "I see nothing in such conduct but insanity. To me it's pitiable. It's pathetic."

"Ah—ah—ah—men!"

intoned Aunt Lydia.

"But he only wanted a quiet place to write his letters," Mopsie protested.

"Well, he found it," sniffed her cousin. "It's a standing joke at Walton, I'm told, to pretend to have a toothache and drop in groaning on the

new practitioner. Every idler in the town has done so."

"That's just like them," said Miss Beatoun. "They would be sure to think of something mean. He's doing no harm there."

"Oh, you stand up for him."

"Why shouldn't I stand up for anyone who is treated badly?" she inquired.

"Mopsie," he said, "I can't allow this to go on."

"Allow what to go on?"

"This acquaintance—this friendship with a fellow who in a fortnight has established himself here as the family tame cat, going and coming as he pleases; hiring offices——"

"That is not at all the way tame cats behave," she interposed.

"Never mind," retorted Sidney. "If you must have flirtations——"

"I don't know anything about flirtations," she exclaimed. "I have never had a chance to practise."

"Then don't begin now," he commanded, wheeling from the chair.

"Why should you care?" Miss Beatoun shut the seed catalogue with a snap.

"You ought not to ask me that." Mr. Beatoun was obliged to raise his voice because Aunt Lydia was executing an ambitious canticle.

“‘Upon an instrument of ten strings and upon the lute;
Upon a loud instrument and upon the harp,’”

she sang in shrill soprano.

“You expect me to take everything for granted!” Mopsie cried, springing quickly to her feet.

The lines of her old-fashioned filmy drapery made her absurdly young, and Mopsie when she sought to be impressive needed the support of every year she owned.

“At least you ought to understand how much I think of you,” he said, gently for him and very earnestly.

“But I don’t,” she broke out with a sudden burst of passion. “I don’t; I don’t; I don’t; and I won’t take anything for granted. Girls want to be told if people like them. They want to be told again and again; they can’t hear it too often. They need to have it shown them in other ways than bossing and fault-finding. They need to be admired and sought after——”

Sidney thrust his hands into the side-pockets of his coat.

“Oh, come, come, Mops,” he protested. “You and I have known each other much too long for that sort of nonsense.”

Perhaps if earlier he had made some allusion to her hair—the smallest joke then would have

been enough—she would have been more patient, more ancillary.

“It is not nonsense, Sidney,” she rejoined, speaking softly, for following the canticle a calm had fallen. “Some day you may understand, but not from me. Some other girl perhaps will make you understand.”

“Have I been such a brute as all that?” he asked, coming nearer by a step.

“You haven’t been a brute at all. You simply haven’t cared,” she said, more like a child than ever in her masquerade with the dim old parlour at her back; more the old Mopsie of a thousand childish squabbles than a woman pleading vaguely for her rights. When she moved to the window to observe how nearly church was over he followed and stood close behind her.

“Taking it altogether,” he went on, “I don’t believe I have been so awfully remiss. Wasn’t I pretty good at writing letters even at school?”

“Oh, yes, indeed,” she said, a faint smile drawing back the corners of her mouth. “You used to write me all about the baseball games.”

“And I’m sure I never missed a week at college.”

“We had got to football by that time,” she admitted. “And when you go to Congress, as they say you will some day, you must send me a treatise on the tariff every week.”

"Are we good friends again?" he asked, disregarding her last observation altogether.

"Of course," she said, moving her head to catch the school-house door between the lilac leaves. Bill was on guard upon the steps, and Peleg, with his nose thrust through a narrow crack, watched for some signal to throw wide the door.

"When we signed the agreement about the Hill," he said, "I thought it would be the end of fighting."

"But it wasn't," she returned.

"No," he admitted. "I'm afraid there will never be an end to our fighting."

"But didn't I give in to you about the Trolley Park?"

"Yes, you did, but now it seems that I was wrong."

"How do you mean wrong?"

"Why, the Company have accepted every one of my suggestions. They have consented to an honest charter. That is how this foolish talk about going to Congress started."

"I don't believe it's foolish," she exclaimed, her whole face lighting up with pleasure.

"Maybe not," he admitted, rather overdoing an assumed indifference.

Miss Beatoun perched herself upon the broad low windowsill.

"Well, anyway, we did not want a noisy trolley park," she said.

Sidney leaned against the casing farthest from her.

"It was not to be so bad as that," he explained. "They were only going to develop the natural beauties of the river side with donkey trails and little resting places, and build a chalet for a goats'-milk cure on top."

"That would have been quite pretty," she admitted. "And of course they could have brought the goats' milk down to any invalid too ill to ride a donkey."

"It was to be a quiet sort of resort for women and children," he went on. "Around the Hill, out of sight from here, they were to have a few wild animals and a panorama of Hell."

"Oh, why didn't they tell us it was going to be so nice before it was too late?" repined Miss Beatoun.

"The offer is open still. It's not too late," put in her cousin.

"Oh, yes, it is," she cried. "We are complicated now with Mr. Stites."

"I'm not in the least bit complicated with that fellow," he asserted.

"No, but I am," she insisted, "and so is Uncle Abner. He told Mr. Stites that I must have twenty thousand for my part, and of course that

means the same for you, because nobody would have any use for half a hill."

"I shouldn't touch a nickel of his nasty money," Sidney broke out, storming from the window. "It's too disgusting, too humiliating."

Once more he strode the room, once more put all the minor furniture in peril. If jealousy is not the sincerest form of flattery, it is certainly the most spectacular. Mopsie faced about, her slippers dangling inches from the floor beneath her antique ruffles.

"It is not at all humiliating, or Uncle Abner would not think of it," she cried, "and you are a horrid overbearing boy to say such things."

"And you are a silly baby," he retorted, falling back upon an old reproach. "If you were not, you would see that this ridiculous creature is simply splurging to impress you with his greatness; to dazzle you with his ability to write cheques. If he were to offer a million dollars for your part, I suppose you'd think it business."

"I should think it was extremely foolish."

"It would not be if he should marry you and get it back again," Sidney argued.

"He doesn't want to marry me," cried Mopsie, warm with indignation.

"He does."

"He does not."

"He does. The whole world knows that he is in love with you. He makes that evident enough."

"At least he does not bellow at me like a bull." Miss Beatoun hopped down from her perch and moved toward a door. "I am not going to stay here and be scolded any more," she added.

Sidney caught up his hat and reached another door in three tremendous strides.

"You need not go on my account," he hissed. "I know when I'm not welcome well enough."

"'As it was in the beginning, is now and ever shall be——'"

sang Aunt Lydia, and Bill, who was familiar with the liturgy, began to bark.

Beatoun of Beatoun must have planned and packed in haste, for well within an hour he was in his station trap, dressed as for travel, while a servant on the back seat guarded a portmantau, cane and umbrella.

Mopsie, who saw him from the lawn, where she stood engaged in conversation with the Walton rector and some lingering lambs, took it for granted that he would not pass without a word, at least some tacit pledge of future reconciliation such as they frequently exchanged in the midst of fiercest battles. And possibly the pledge

might not have been lacking had it not been for Mr. Lawlor.

Lawlor had observed from afar a vacant seat, and with him opportunity was ever parent of desire.

"By Jove!" he called out from the Dacer gate, "luck comes to the lucky man when he's asleep. Here I've been snoozing in a hammock all the afternoon and wondering how I should get to Walton. Country manners, isn't it? to beg a lift? eh, what?"

"Get in," said Mr. Beatoun, none too cordially.

"Fine cob of yours," commented Mr. Lawlor as he placed one foot upon the step. "Never feels a few pounds' extra weight. You are quite sure this is not an infernal imposition?"

"Get in," repeated Mr. Beatoun.

"I'd do the same for you."

"Of course you would. Get in."

The cob was growing restive. Mopsie on the lawn had turned back to face the rector, a celibate professed but bound by vows as breakable as those of widowhood.

"I should not trouble you for worlds, but it's quite important I should get to Walton."

"Confound it, man alive! Get in."

The rector—a man much younger than he looked, though no one could possibly have been

as good—was engaged in sacerdotal efforts to make friends with Bill (at heart a godless, unregenerate dog), without success, which evidently amused Miss Beatoun, for she laughed, nor had Sidney heard her laugh more naturally.

“Get in,” he said again to Mr. Lawlor in a tone that brought the financier beside him at a bound; and in another moment the echoes of the bridge were sounding a retreat.

“Give me a good horse after all—eh, what?” observed the guest, settling to comfort as the travellers rounded Heartbreak by the shorter hilly road. “A motor car is all to the merry if you want to go a hundred miles, but for a jog through pretty country with a congenial companion, I’m for a chance to light up a cigar and look about me, eh?”

“Ugh!” assented the congenial companion, and Mr. Lawlor thus encouraged lighted his cigar, first offering one to Sidney, who declined.

“Give me,” he went on unperturbed, “a chance to open my mouth without absorbing the entire atmosphere at one gulp.”

“Ugh!” assented Sidney, and Lawlor, throwing out his chest, pursued his line of thought.

“Scenery!” he apostrophised. “I’d like to see that Hill of yours matched anywhere. I wish to Heaven I owned it.”

“What would you do with it if you did?”

demanded Sidney, for the first time showing even civil interest in his guest's remarks.

"Sell it," replied the other, promptly.

"Who to?" demanded Sidney, who had not till then found Lawlor's conversation worth attention.

Mr. Lawlor shook his head and formed his lips into a deprecating smile.

"That's hardly a fair question, Beatoun," he replied, and roused himself as though about to change the subject. The opportunity had come so unexpectedly that he needed time, a very little time, to meet it fittingly.

"All right. You needn't answer," the other gentleman agreed, and a silence followed, lasting only long enough for a man of inspirations to decide upon a plan.

"Please do not misunderstand me," he began, "it is only that I feel a certain delicacy about butting in to other people's affairs, eh, what? I mean to say that negotiations being under way between the owners of the property and my, ahem!—acquaintance, Stites——"

"Nothing of the sort," snapped Sidney. "You can disregard that individual altogether."

"Good!" cried Lawlor, highly gratified. "I love a man who says exactly what he means. Beatoun," he added, "may I speak to you with perfect frankness?"

"So long as you supply the frankness," Sidney answered, grimly. Mr. Lawlor laughed and spoke.

"Have you ever heard of the Aerial, Surface and Subterranean Telegraph and Communication Company?"

"No," answered Sidney. "I have not."

"Will you permit me to explain its objects very briefly?" Lawlor asked.

"No," answered Sidney. "Not just now. I should not understand. But if such a corporation wants to buy the Hill you might tell me very briefly how much they will give."

"Twenty-five thousand dollars; five more than you refused from the Trolley Company."

"How do you know that?"

"Common report. Everybody knows it; my Company knows it. That's the reason they are willing to give so much,—know they must or lose it altogether. Ground hog case, eh, what?"

"What do they want of it?"

"Elevated point, you see, only one for miles; only chance to polarise vibrations, absolutely necessary to the system," explained Mr. Lawlor, almost persuaded to believe in so plausible a theory himself. But Sidney's mind was too full of another aspect of the matter to go deeply into scientific possibilities.

"Do you think it could be arranged that my

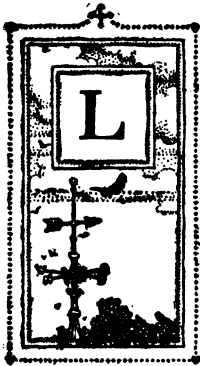
cousin and joint owner should receive twenty thousand for her half while I took what was left?" he asked, growing furiously red, for he felt like a conspirator.

"By Jove!" cried Lawlor, "that's what I call a damned chivalric sort of thing that makes a man think better of humanity; sort of thing a fellow with fine sentiments of his own appreciates——"

"Never mind all that," the other interposed. "My reasons may be absolutely selfish. Now about your profit? Where do you come in?"

"Leave that to me," said Lawlor with such depth of feeling that the question was not pressed.

CHAPTER XV



AWLOR declined Sidney's offer of the trap to take him back to Beatoun's Bridge. He was expecting a friend, he explained, by the west bound—not due for an hour—and he would depend on the livery stable for transportation. When the east bound came and left on time the two men shook hands heartily. "Remember, Beatoun," were the final words, "I'll do the best I can for you, and that's all any man can promise."

For a moment he experienced an elation born of lofty and disinterested purpose, but even as he watched the train depart he felt his moral glass begin to fall and knew that ere he reached the Painless Parlours it would probably stand at zero.

"A gentleman," he reflected as he braved the Sabbath solitudes of High Street, "had better not set up a carriage or a sense of honour unless he can afford to do the thing in style."

At the Sign of the Tooth a doleful figure met his eyes; a figure seated on the lower step of a steep dusty flight, its elbows on its knees, consuming cigarettes; a figure sullen and dull-eyed, morose and altogether miserable. In short, the figure of young Jones, the office boy, in such uncongenial environment that an ultra-urban collar only served to make his wretchedness the more apparent.

"Take heart!" cried Lawlor cheerily by way of greeting. "The worst is yet to come."

"Oh, you be hanged!" young Jones took heart sufficiently to answer.

"How long have you been here?"

Jones added the burnt end of his cigarette to the litter of a dozen others on the floor and set his foot on it.

"Since yesterday," he said. "S. S. telegraphed me to come and protect him. The rubes down here were threatening to eat him up alive."

"What can you do about it?"

"Just what I'm doing now, I suppose—sit here and head off toothachers. It's worse than death."

"What do you suppose he is up to?" speculated Mr. Lawlor with a friendly chuckle.

"Search me!" replied the weary Jones in hyperbole.

"Don't he get letters?—telegrams?"

"Sure. Got one last night. Authority to draw one hundred thousand dollars." Jones checked himself and added, "Say, forget that, won't you, please?"

"It's no affair of mine," the financier replied. "Come over to my place and see me any time you get a chance."

"Where do you live?"

"At Beatoun's Bridge. It isn't far. First person you meet will point you out the way."

"That's where the girl lives, isn't it?"

"What girl?" Mr. Lawlor was surprised, amused and interested all at once.

"The girl S. S. is spoony on," Jones threw out boldly at a venture.

"Well, that is the first I have heard of her," lied Mr. Lawlor, more to keep himself in practice than with deliberate purpose to deceive. "Where is S. S., upstairs?"

Jones nodded.

"Walk right in," he said, "and if you find him taking laughing gas to pass the time, for pity's sake don't interfere. I'd like a chance to get a little exercise—Jehoshaphat!" he yawned, extending heavenward a pair of roseate cuffs, "I used to wonder why folks went to church—but now I know."

Mr. Stites, who was not inhaling laughing gas unless that vapour may be breathed from Sun-

day newspapers, sprang out of the operating chair to greet his visitor with so much effusion that distressing features of the last encounter seemed forgotten.

"Come in," he cried "and tell me if you ever saw a fiercer room in all your life."

Lawlor took in the Painless decorations at a glance:—the statuette, the stereopticon with views of Paris, France, the case of butterflies.

"It's not exactly what I should have chosen had I been in your place," he admitted. "I should have picked out some large well-furnished ground floor sitting-room in one of the old-fashioned houses on Prospect Street. Something with atmosphere and character, eh? where a man might brew a cup of tea of an afternoon and call the ladies in. Something more redolent of lavender and rose leaves than creosote and rubber dams. Something that did not make you think an auction-shop had moved into a disused morgue, eh, what?"

"Light a cigar and help me change the atmosphere," suggested Mr. Stites, somewhat taken aback. He had been prepared for criticism, but Lawlor's comments verged upon contempt; they killed the Crusoe Club at one fell blow.

"Of course you did not know the ropes," went on the financier, selecting a cigar. "I wish, old chap, you had consulted me."

"Sit down," said Mr. Stites, "and make yourself at home."

"Thanks," said the other gentleman. "Business first. I came especially to offer you Heartbreak Hill for fifty thousand dollars, net, spot cash and all the rest of it. Take it or leave it, yes or no, in half an hour up goes the price."

Mr. Stites relighted a cigar which had gone out.

"It seems to me you're rather in a hurry for an answer," he remarked.

"Quite right," replied the financier. "I am to meet a friend in half an hour at the station, coming by the west bound. Man of means who knows a good thing when he sees it, quick as a hair trigger, man of action——"

"In that case," interrupted Mr. Stites, "my answer to your proposition must be 'No' decidedly. I'll not be bullied and I'll not be bluffed. And, what is more, I mean to run my own affairs without your interference."

There was an unwonted air of confidence and self-reliance about Mr. Stites which accorded perfectly with Jones' story of the telegram, and Lawlor recognised at once the subtle influence of money, tangible money.

"Good!" he cried. "I rather like your spirit, but hang me if I catch your point of view."

"My point of view this afternoon has been

that window overlooking High Street," Stites made answer, letting fly a valuable projectile rather prematurely, "and if I am not very much mistaken I observed——"

"Your humble servant driving with his good friend Sidney Beatoun," Lawlor put in promptly. "Well, what of it?"

"Nothing," Mr. Stites admitted, "only if one should make a guess——"

"You don't have to make a guess with me, my boy," the financier protested. "I'm square as a brick church, I am, seats free and strangers welcome, open all the week for private meditation——"

"Oh, that's all right," said Mr. Stites, taking a turn at interrupting. "Only be pleased to understand I know who sent you here."

"Good!" answered Lawlor, gratified to perceive how easily the other could mislead himself without assistance.

"And be pleased to understand," repeated Mr. Stites, who seemed to like the phrase, "that I do not wish to have any dealings whatsoever with the gentleman in whose society you drove to town."

"You will have to if you wish to buy the Hill."

"Not necessarily."

"But he owns half the property."

"Confound his half!"

Mr. Lawlor broke into a comprehending laugh.

"I see your game," he cried. "You only want the river side. You are thinking of the water power. Well, here's a tip for you. It isn't worth a cent; the stream runs nearly dry in time of drouth."

"If you won't sit down, I will," said Mr. Stites, and suiting the action to the words he bestrode a chair and leaned his elbows on the back. "Thanks for the tip," he said when comfortably disposed. "But I knew all that before. Got any others?"

"Oh, yes, a lot of them," replied the financier, taking his favourite seat when there were tables to be sat upon. "And here's a good one: there is not a soul in Beatoun County who believes the whole confounded briar-patch worth fifty cents."

"And yet," said Mr. Stites, "you coolly ask me to pay fifty thousand dollars for it. Why?"

Mr. Lawlor blew three measured puffs of smoke into the air before he answered with deliberation.

"In the first place, Stites," he said, "the money is not your own"—the broker winced—"and in the second place," went on the financier, "you have managed to put yourself in a position where you've either got to make good or lose the girl."

Mr. Stites sprang to his feet and would no

doubt have uttered words of indignation had Mr. Lawlor given him sufficient time.

"Stop!" cried the financier. "Just keep your coat on for a minute more and hear me out. You have not got a clear field there, my boy, by any means."

Stites tossed his dead cigar into a piece of Painless bric-a-brac and thrust his hands into his pockets. His face was rather pale; his voice unnaturally calm.

"I am beginning to perceive your drift," he said. "So it's the clear field I am to pay for, is it?—your country gentleman has certain prior claims he is willing to dispose of at a profit."

"No!" roared Lawlor, for the moment absolutely sincere; for the moment every particle of decency and manhood in him up in arms. "No, you wretched cad. Do you imagine everything on God's green earth is for sale?—youth, honour, good looks——"

"Now don't make such a row," protested Mr. Stites. "There's not a gallery looking on. Be calm, be reasonable, be a good fellow. When you get back to the station you can tell your friend you had it out with me. To-morrow, if you like, I'll wear my right arm in a sling. But tell him at the same time that his price is rather high. Intimate that the Gibson type is going out of fashion, intimate that Newport has attractions

at this season for a good-looking fellow with ten thousand to his credit, intimate what you please. You're a man of tact, Lawlor, a diplomat."

"I must be something pretty low-down not to throttle you," conjectured Lawlor with a hand upon the door knob.

"And, by the way," continued Mr. Stites, lowering his voice and coming two steps nearer, "if you could use five hundred till we meet again—"

Mr. Lawlor dropped into a drawl he sometimes affected for his own amusement.

"Thanks, thanks, old chap," he said. "I happen to be rather flush at present; borrowed two dollars only yesterday from dear Louisa; going now to use her credit at the livery stable. Awfully good of you, though, shan't forget it to my dying day. Good-bye. So long! Ta ta! We'll meet at Philippi, eh, what?"

It would have surprised the waiting Jones should he have known the truth. As it was he drew from Lawlor's rapid stride toward the railway an inference that the financier had sought to borrow money from S. S. and failed. Five minutes later he was actually surprised and at the same time gratified to receive instructions calling for immediate action.

He was to proceed with all speed to the station and there secure a ticket and a Pullman section

on the ten o'clock east bound. He was to keep Lawlor under observation while he himself remained invisible. He was to note who Lawlor spoke with; whom—if anyone—he met on the arrival of the west bound; and for the next few days he was given liberty to follow the devices and desires of his own heart. On no account was he to commune with Lawlor, either then or later.

“If he ain't a friend of yours he's none of mine,” announced the ever-loyal office boy.

Among Mr. Lawlor's most convenient peculiarities was a liking for railway stations; a taste indulged in freely during recent months of impecuniosity. He enjoyed the freedom of such places, the unquestioned right to any seat that happened to be vacant, and, moreover, he derived much simple entertainment from the discomfitures and anxieties of others. In the Walton station he chose, naturally, a place from which a good view of the ticket office could be had, and there sat down to open and re-read a letter he had written that afternoon and left unsealed.

“My dear Admiral,” it began, “things are getting on so well that I shall need another hundred right away. Small bills, please, and send it by express in a box of pretty fair cigars. Please put in a card with From the Crowd, or We Miss

You at the Club, or something genial and off-hand—you understand. I shan't need any more, for this is turning out to be a case of finesse more than money. Hope to pull it off with about one thousand per cent. divvy. The letters came all right, but do let up on the 'dainty missives.' They must have got some actor's order mixed with mine. What I require is substantial matter from well-known houses, and perhaps a high-class circular occasionally, the sort of thing that makes a good impression. Send me an important one for Tuesday, sure. Bank or Trust Company if possible, heavy stationery, large envelope, but not too fat. Better register it, that always sets them talking in a place like this. Don't forget the cigars.—L. A. W."

Mr. Lawlor chuckled, licked the flap of the envelope, held it till it stuck, and walking to the mail-box let the letter drop. As he turned again he caught sight of young Jones before the ticket window, and observed that even while he made his purchase the office boy did not lose sight of him.

The financier feigned interest in a time table on the wall. Jones crossed directly to the newsstand, now closed, and feigned an equal interest in the imprisoned magazines. The financier pretended to make notes concerning trains; the office

boy pretended to weigh himself, but neglected the preliminary penny in the slot. Lawlor transferred his operations to the Ladies' Waiting Room and Jones found a post of observation near the door. This set at rest all doubts in Mr. Lawlor's mind and moved him to take up the game with zest. He sought the freight-room and made inquiries of the agent about a missing case of harness blacking. This caused no little trouble and discussion, which Jones could only follow through a window.

The agent gave his word to look the matter up if on the morrow the consignee would produce an invoice. He was an obliging man and admitted Lawlor to an inner room where there were several pieces of unclaimed freight but naturally no case of harness blacking. Next, Lawlor, after a cautious look in every direction save that of Jones', walked rapidly to an old man seated on a baggage truck and, bending low, begged in a whisper for the favour of a match. The old man had no matches, and the financier departed from him with what looked like a mysterious sign. The office boy was hot upon the trail by this time; he dodged, he doubled, intercepted, lay in wait. He peered through cracks of doors; crouched, crept and left no ruse of following untried. He noted that the financier sat down with every outward show of friendship beside a

woman with a child, for whom he purchased automatic chocolate and self-selling chewing gum. He saw his quarry deep in consultation with a hack-driver, and just before the coming of the train he saw him at the telegraph office, writing a despatch which seemed to call for deep reflection.

Though Mr. Lawlor gave much thought to his despatch, even when it was written it did not appear to satisfy him, for he looked upon it with mistrust and doubt. His manner was abstracted and uncertain, as with halting step he approached the operator's window. Half way he underwent a change of purpose, and crumpling the paper into a ball threw it, with a gesture of impatience, almost at Jones' feet.

Nevertheless he was upon the platform when the west-bound train arrived all in good time to greet the celebrated traveller, Mr. Bullivant, and escort that interesting gentleman with his bag and baggage to the waiting hack, and his pleasure at the meeting was no more exuberant than that of his guest.

"I warned you that you would find us somewhat primitive," said Mr. Lawlor.

"If you have a blanket and a campfire, that's all I want," replied the lion-hunter. "I can shoot my own supper, yes, and cook it, too, my boy."

"But no objection to a fried chicken, I suppose?" suggested Mr. Lawlor. "Hot waffles, and a drop of Beatoun County apple jack, eh, what?"

Mr. Bullivant rubbed his hands together and smacked his lips in fond anticipation.

"That sort of thing don't seem to have made you any thinner," he remarked.

Meanwhile the office boy, having found a place of solitude, was reading:

"To Jones, the Child Detective: If anybody should doubt that you are a mean-spirited little sneak, show them this.—Uncle Fred."

Jones' report to Mr. Stites was brief and satisfactory. Mr. Lawlor had spoken to no one at the station, and after hanging around until the train came in he had gone back to Beatoun's Bridge.

"Keep your eyes wide open while I'm away," said his employer, "but don't appear to do so."

CHAPTER XVI



R. FREDERICK LAWLOR had enjoyed too long that immunity from enemies which the gods accord by way of compensation to those who make few friends. Reckless by nature and thrown off his balance by misfortune, he had wantonly provoked the ire of a microbe, forgetting that in animosities size counts for less than nothing.

And thus it happened that young Jones kept triple ends in view when mapping out his first real country holiday. The spirit of adventure lured him to the unknown perils of the fields; the atmosphere of mystery surrounding Beattoun's Bridge aroused his curiosity; and a strong desire to "get even" with the financier lent strength and courage to his limbs.

Though the skies were threatening he did not know it. A country boy would have foreseen thunder showers in the hot still air and thickening distances. Jones knew only that he perspired freely, and that the path along the bank

of Roundabout was infested by nomadic tribes of cattle-fed mosquitoes. He cursed the country as a lonesome, uneventful place of bugs, and regretted more than once the cool seclusion of the Painless Parlours. As he walked, the red bridge that had looked so near at starting seemed to recede, but when he turned to Walton the town had well-nigh faded out of sight; so there was nothing for it but to push on, leaping ditches, rolling under wire fences, and avoiding by occasional detours kine of doubtful sex. Sometimes an awful dread of death by hunger and exposure on the boundless Beatoun meadows came upon him, and to keep his courage up he whistled scraps of song from comic operas.

When the first drops pattered on the stubble he tucked his new straw hat beneath his arm and started in a bee-line for the covered bridge. Though something of an athlete in his town-bred way it is improbable that Jones will ever make a better sprint than that which carried him along the path and up the stepped abutment and under shelter before the rain came down in earnest.

The interior of the bridge was dusty and dark but dry, and for a time the office boy found in it many points of interest. The heavy timbers in themselves were worth examination; the remnants of last year's circus posters afforded entertainment and the public notices solid infor-

mation—especially An Act to Amend An Act entitled An Act amending An Act entitled An Act to regulate the Speed of Self-Propelling Vehicles on Public Highways. This last Jones read with care because it pointed out the many ways in which the Porcupine might get himself into trouble, and Jones disliked the Porcupine for wasting so much of S. S.'s absence on repairs.

From one end of the bridge there was a glimpse to be had into the dripping depths of Heartbreak woods; from the other through a veil of rain one of muddy road, and beyond a large brick house which did not seem in any wise concerned in Mr. Jones' plight. To him it looked a lonely house whose inhabitants were to be pitied, and the Dacer place seemed even less attractive. Altogether Jones was glad that his lot had not been cast at Beatoun's Bridge.

The wind swept through the covered span and moaned and whistled in the beams and rafters overhead. The rain upon the shingles filled the place with a hollow melancholy roar, and as the lagging minutes followed one another, young Jones, tired of his prison, looked about for almost any means of killing time. It was then that he discovered that there were nests high up above him in the shadow. Mud-swallows' nests, of course, but for all that he knew to the contrary haunts of birds of paradise.

The nests suggested eggs, wonderful eggs, no doubt, red, blue and parti-coloured eggs, each one a pleasant souvenir of travel and to be had with very little trouble and no expense. The lower timbers of the truss stood cross-wise like so many giant repetitions of the letter X, and above the beams, strengthened with brace and strutt and counter-brace, afforded footholds, handholds, kneeholds for a daring climber not deterred by half a century's accumulated dust.

Jones gave a spring, a clutch, a wriggle and a kick, and found himself face downward on a mighty beam, unhurt though well-nigh choked. Then startled swallows seemed to fill the air, and apprehension seized upon him that a major article of dress had suffered in a vital seam. He cursed the builders of the bridge; the eggs, as yet far out of reach; the birds, whose cries might at any moment bring some rural constable to pronounce his act a trespass punishable by fine, imprisonment or both. Long he lay there, scarcely breathing, listening for the sound of footsteps on the planks below, and when at last they came—as come they did—he knew that safety depended on remaining still.

Almost simultaneously two men entered the bridge from opposite directions, stamping muddy boots, and with no delay at all addressing one another noisily.

"Well, where the deuce have you been?" one demanded, and the voice was that of Lawlor.

"Oh, only for a little constitutional in the rain—eh, what?" returned the other, and the tones suggested playful mockery of Lawlor.

"Get wet?"

"My boy, I never stop to think if I am wet or dry, hot or cold, hungry or full up."

"Rot!" commented Mr. Lawlor, somewhat rudely. "Rot! What do you say to a scamper on the Hill as soon as it clears off a bit?"

"Thanks, not for me. I've been there for the last two hours."

"On Heartbreak Hill?"

"Well, on the only hill in sight, if that's its blooming name."

"Why didn't you wait for me?" demanded Lawlor.

"Because I much preferred to be alone," replied the other gentleman, none other than the expert Bullivant, though this would have meant nothing to young Jones if he had known.

The men, confident of seclusion, continued shouting even after they stood face to face in the middle of the span where Jones could have dropped an egg between them from above—if he had been supplied.

"That makes the second time that you've

sneaked away from me," complained Mr. Lawlor.

"And the last," the other man assured him with a laugh. "I have seen all I need of Heartbreak for the present."

"You can't have seen it all," protested Lawlor. "Why, there are one hundred acres in the tract."

"Really?" The tone implied slight interest in the acreage.

"Yes; and we should examine every foot of it."

"Why?"

"To find out——" Lawlor checked himself and changed the form of his reply. "To estimate the value of the property," he said, guardedly.

"What is your idea on that point?" asked the other, still more guardedly. "What do you think it worth?"

"Isn't that what you are here to find out?" the financier demanded.

"Exactly," was the calm rejoinder. "And I have found out."

"Then why in thunder don't you tell me what it is?" cried Lawlor as he grasped the other's arm, and the rumble that came down from Heartbreak Hill could not have been more aptly timed.

"My discoveries are my own until they are paid for," said the expert, and it was fortunate

that the protruding ear of Jones might in the semi-darkness have been taken for a fungus growth upon the ancient beam.

"But don't I mean to pay you?" Lawlor cried, almost distracted by impatience. "Don't I intend to let you in?"

"How can you let me in when you are not in yourself?" inquired Mr. Bullivant, and in a tone of reasonable argument he went on: "I came here at my own expense but at your suggestion, I admit, and the question is how far I ought to let *you* in."

"Let *me* in?" roared Lawlor. "I like your impudence. Let *me* in? when the whole scheme is mine from start to finish!"

"The start is all right perhaps," admitted Mr. Bullivant, "but I'm not so sure about the finish. Come, Lawlor, why not take a thousand for your trouble and drop out?"

"Drop out!" The rafters would have resounded had the rain upon the roof been less aggressive.

"Yes, drop out," repeated Mr. Bullivant in tones so rasping and cold-blooded that a chill went down the spine of Jones. "Take your thousand and drop out unless you are man enough to make up to the pretty girl who'll get the money. You're a widower, aren't you? You see, I know a lot I didn't know the evening of

the Bean Feast—I know now that you’re busted, that your reputation is badly shopworn—there’s the truth for you.”

“Say, don’t go back on me like that,” cried Lawlor, his courage in a moment failing him, his vaunting manner changed to one of supplication. “Don’t rob me of my only chance,” he begged. “I’ve had my troubles, that I don’t deny, but I’m not ‘all in’ by any means. I’ll make good yet, you’ll see; I’ve got a lot of friends left, and I can prove it. Just look here and here——”

Jones, watching, saw him take out letters from his pocket, saw him point with eager fingers to the printed mercantile addresses on the covers while he went on:

“‘Union Consolidated Trust’—that’s from the president.—‘Transcontinental Telegraph’—secretary of that concern and I were chums at Harvard. ‘Equitable Bank’—all confidential or I’d let you read them. I’m expecting one tomorrow from the biggest man in Wall Street—the very biggest man, you understand, ready to back me in this matter to the limit.”

“Is that true?” asked Mr. Bullivant. The letters if they had not brought conviction had at least awakened reasonable doubts.

“True as the heavens shine above us,” vowed Mr. Lawlor, forgetful that the heavens were not shining at the time.

"We'll see how things turn out," said the expert reflectively.

Lawlor moved away to pace the bridge, his eyes upon the planks, as Jones decided, judging from the angle of his hat. The other leaned against the truss and lit a cigarette, the fumes of which floated up to grateful nostrils. Presently the financier came back and seemed to examine Mr. Bullivant's stout boots intently.

"Well, how about the Hill?" he asked. "You made discoveries there this morning, I suppose; satisfied yourself that there was something doing; found out I was right—eh, what?"

"Perhaps." The expert smoked and Jones advanced a cautious nose to miss no single whiff.

"Stumbled on it by accident,—eh, what?"

"Yes, that's exactly what occurred," rejoined the other man. "I learned the secret of your Heartbreak Hill by purest accident, and for the present I intend to keep it."

"To keep it?—if you can."

"That won't be hard."

Lawlor burst into a loud derisive laugh.

"I don't believe your footprints have been washed away," he cried, and, turning, rushed out into the rain toward Heartbreak woods.

Bullivant started in pursuit, but changing his purpose after a stride or two, wheeled on his heel and moved almost as rapidly in the opposite di-

rection till the listener judged that he had left the bridge. The beam was growing harder every minute, the smell of ancient swallows' nests more pronounced, and when at last the office boy felt free to move he found with joy that he had been mistaken about the rip. As he could not see beyond the nearest beam on either side he counted seven hundred to make certainty more sure that Bullivant had gone, and then dropped down, his hair filled with small sticks, his mouth and eyes with dust, and his clothing grimy to the last degree, especially in front. It was a great relief to stand erect, but even as he dropped he wished himself once more upon the beam. For concerning Mr. Bullivant he had been altogether wrong. That gentleman stood smoking at the opening of the bridge in placid contemplation of the driving rain; and at the sound of Jones' drop he turned.

Now Mr. Bullivant had learned in Central Africa the useful art of throwing Kaffirs into fits of abject terror. He had acquired a truth-compelling trick of magnifying his natural squint, and his beak-like nose seemed made for pecking secrets from the breast of guile.

"Who are you?" he demanded with a movement of the fingertips suggesting imminent dismemberment.

"My name is Jones," replied the office boy.

"Probably a lie," commented Mr. Bullivant. "Have you never heard that there are laws against listening, spying, eavesdropping and peeking?"

Jones shook his head.

"Well, there are such laws," went on the beak-nosed gentleman. "In some countries you would be taken out and shot without a trial."

"I've not been listening, sir," protested Jones. "I've been hunting for birds' eggs."

"What kind of birds' eggs?"

"I don't know."

"I thought as much!" The expert drew down the corners of his mouth until it brought to mind the leading feature of a shark. "And I suppose you value life," he continued, smiling as a shark might smile upon a young and panic-stricken porpoise, while Jones confessed his guilty passion for prolonged existence by a shamefaced nod.

The man from Africa made an impressive figure in his belted suit of frieze and lion-stalking cap, and his every well-directed question bagged its fact.

"And so," he said in summary, the inquisition being at an end, "you are Stites' office boy, you have a grudge against old Lawlor, as you call him, and you have overheard a private conversation that may get you into serious trouble."

"Oh, I know how to keep my mouth shut," Jones protested. He had recovered altogether from his fright by this time, and stood once more the financier in embryo, the sharper quick to seize upon an opportunity. As he brushed away the litter of the beam he kept a cunning eye on Bullivant. "I suppose you know," he said, "that Lawlor's letters were no more than so much 'bunk.'"

"Good!" cried the expert. "You are a bright young fellow, Jones. You may be useful. Tell me more about the letters—tell me everything you know."

He grasped Jones by the arm and drew him to the light, a kindly shark, whose friendship small fish might be proud to claim.

"Of course I can't be sure," said Jones, "but you can buy such letters by the dozen; have them sent to you, I mean, on any line of stationery you choose."

"Now who conducts this noble enterprise?" inquired Mr. Bullivant, deeply interested.

"I don't mention names," said Jones, "but there is a barkeep in the Street who gets the letter-headings off low-down office boys, and janitors, and scrubwomen, and I think his sister, who's a cripple, does the writing."

"You know the system by experience, I suppose?"

"No, I don't."

"By hearsay only?" Mr. Bullivant appeared to be incredulous, though not at all repelled by the disclosure.

"Yes, that's all," replied the office boy. "I wouldn't do such things myself, and besides we're only brokers and our paper wouldn't fetch enough to pay a fellow for the risk. It's different in a bank or Trust Company. I've seen President's Private quoted at a dollar—buyer three."

"You interest me very much, young Jones," declared the expert. "In Africa, you see, I have fallen somewhat behind the times."

"I saw that right away," rejoined the office boy, "and when you are dealing with a chap like Lawlor you have to be up to date."

"And do you think the letter he expects will be another specimen of 'bunk'?"

"Sure."

"I should rather like to catch him at a trick of that sort," Mr. Bullivant reflected.

"Send old Lawlor up the river, wouldn't it?" put in the office boy with glee.

"What do you mean by 'up the river'?" asked the other, and for answer Jones looked at him through his parted fingers as through prison bars.

The expert smiled.

"You have a fertile brain, young Jones," he said. "You ought to make a useful member of society—in one direction or another. Now get out of sight. Go home."

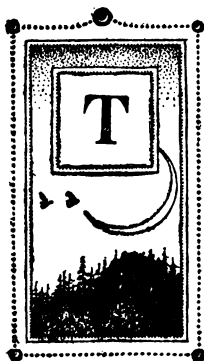
"It's raining still," the office boy protested.

"Then get underneath the bridge and wait until it stops," returned the man of resource, adding, "And by the way, be there again to-morrow afternoon."

"What time?"

"As early as you can after your dinner, and lie low till I come. If things turn out all right you won't lose anything."

CHAPTER XVII



HERE was a downpour brewing certainly; a precipitation of some sort, cyclone in miniature or gentle rain; and the centre of disturbance promised to be Heartbreak Hill unless all signs were wrong. The mists of morning had sulked about the summit instead of flying up to join their playmates in the blue; the beech-leaves trembled nervously from no apparent cause, and every now and then the forest seemed to draw a long, deep breath,—all warnings that Miss Beatoun would have recognised had her mind not been fully occupied with other matters.

At Beatoun's Bridge observers fancied symptoms of disturbance in the moral atmosphere, and prophecies were freely made that when the tempest broke, the Hill would be the target for its wrath. Sidney had gone off hurriedly after a quarrel with his cousin, so the gossips had it, and Mr. Stites had disappeared from Walton and his Painless Parlours. Then, too, the mystery of Lawlor's presence had but deepened

with the coming of his lion-shooting friend, and it was reported that the Trolley Company had become impatient for an answer to their offer. Small wonder that the Postmaster went about his business with a worried and abstracted air, and less (the good folks were agreed) that Mopsie's efforts to appear as usual were easily seen through. It was a small world, that which centred in the Bridge, a narrow and provincial world, unskilful at discrimination and apt in moments of unrest to overrate trivial incidents. A rumour that the Van Buskirk boy was almost sure that he had caught a glimpse of the little foreigner—he of the hair-restoring herbs—in Heartbreak woods, was given credence and connected vaguely with the problem of the hour. Even the circumstance that Madam Triboulet, back from her journey ill and tired, had denied herself to every visitor but Mopsie, did not escape the same association.

Madame was a brave woman, having the well-trying blood of barricade defenders in her Gallic veins, but there were moments when—alone with Mopsie—she gave way without restraint to temperamental outbursts.

“Oh, why am I alive?” she moaned on the morning of the storm. “Why am I left alone and helpless to eat out my heart with doing nothing?”

“Madame, my dear Madame,” responded Mop-

sie, "do not tell me what has happened if you would rather that I did not know, but you must, you really must, tell Uncle Abner. He is a lawyer and an awfully clever one, and you know he has the biggest, kindest heart that ever beat. He will advise you, and whatever your trouble may be he will tell you in a moment just exactly what to do."

"No, no," the Frenchwoman lamented loudly. "I confide in no one, no, not even you."

"I should think that even I would be better than no one at all," suggested Mopsie, a very natural curiosity altogether lost in sympathetic interest. "But tell me one thing," she went on, "is it about your Shut-In friend that you are troubled?"

"My friend is no longer a Shut-In," Madame admitted. "But, as you love me, child, don't ask me any more."

They were in Madame's large bedroom in the Dacer house, and Mopsie noted with much satisfaction that her friend even as she spoke was not unmindful of the looking-glass.

"I'll promise not to ask another thing," Miss Beatoun said, "but you must let me prophesy."

"Please do," begged Madame, and Mopsie, laughing, closed her eyelids and held them down with two forefingers. Then with a cry of pleasure she pretended to discover wondrous things.

"I am sure that all will turn out for the best,

the very best," she said, "and whatever you are wishing for will happen very soon in the most delightful and surprising way when you are least expecting it."

"Ah, you are a good witch!" cried Madame, cheering up with marvellous alacrity, and presently she admitted having sent that day an additional dollar to the lottery, thus doubling her supply of hope.

"But my prediction will come true without the lottery," the seer persisted, basing her conviction on the general principle that life—like Peleg's russet cider—was bound to clear itself if left to work. "Let us go a little way up Heartbreak Hill," she added, anxious only to distract her friend.

"A little promenade will do me good," Madame agreed, anxious only to be doing, and a beneficent promenade it was to prove for both.

Just where the Field of the Cloth of Gold—a hillside meadow, acre-broad and steeper than the school-house roof—abuts upon the rocks and crevasses of higher Heartbreak, there stood a small shed, open to the south and built to shelter coasting parties in the winter. From here the bob-sleds, starting with a bound, crossed Eden as the crow flies, skimmed the buried brook of Kedron, and—should the crust be at its best—flew out upon the frozen lowlands for a mile. The

Heartbreak slide was popular throughout the level countryside, as many an autograph in the shed bore witness. Year after year the rosy, romping companies had climbed the Hill to laugh and sip their coffee between flights about the rusty little stove, leaving no token but the scribbled names to show for all the fun. The shed was furnished with a bench put up by Peleg Prout the memorable winter when Mopsie had taken her first wild downward swoop, clad like a worsted monkey, and protected from disaster by her cousin's boyish arms.

The record of this mighty moment still remained upon the walls, for Sidney had renewed it often with the blackest of lead pencils, and some facetious prophet had enclosed the double Beatoun in the rather crooked outline of a heart.

Madame and Mopsie sat down panting on the bench and looked at one another, laughing, at about the same moment that young Jones had found a refuge from the self-same shower in the covered bridge.

"Peleg Prout told me it was going to rain," remarked Miss Beatoun with profound contrition in her voice, "but I forgot."

Madame's French shoulders gave an amiable shrug.

"What matters it so long as one is dry?" she said. "One must be somewhere."

"It is not so bad here, is it?" Mopsie said, and Madame continued to affirm that no retreat could be more charming for a rainy hour or so than Mopsie's shed.

As for Miss Beatoun, she adored the humble and dilapidated shack because to her it represented something very different. In the old days when Æsop had outranked both Grimm and Holy-Writ in point of credibility she and her cousin had made believe that all the Heartbreak fauna gathered there o' moonlight nights for social relaxation; haughty squirrels, plethoric woodchucks, and a sprinkling of unimportant mice and lizards. And some of these fantastic tales she told Madame, who found them ravishing, she said, adding:

"What a pity it is that your cousin grew up to be so fact of the matter."

"You mean 'matter of fact,'" laughed Mopsie, and this brought the conversation to the inexhaustible theme of languages. When it thundered they held hands for mutual encouragement, and when it did not, Mopsie to amuse her friend, attempted limericks in French.

"On dit qu'un jeune homme du pays
Rencontra un woodchuck one day.
Lui offrit un elgar,
Mais la bête refusa.
Il n'aime qu'une absinthe frappée."

"But that is not possible," Madame protested.
"It does not rhyme nor does it make good sense."

"Is this any better?" inquired Mopsie, humbly—

"Une demoiselle sans parapluie
Stood under a wide-spreading tree,
Quand on criait 'Ma coquette,
Do you like getting wet?'
Elle sourit et repondit, 'Mais, oui!'"

"That is much worse," cried Madame. "Mopsie, you are a rogue."

"Well, it is your turn now," rejoined Miss Beatoun, and thereupon Madame recited verses from Racine, with a sweet monotony of rhythm like music in itself. As an encore she sang a song about an untruthful soldier and a maiden, enriched by many little shrugs and pursings of the lips. If in truth the soldier had expressed himself in any such fashion she must have been a foolish maid indeed to believe him for a moment. Then it was Mopsie's turn again.

"A Traveller met a Headless One,
The night was dark and drear.
There was no light at all in sight,
Nor any refuge near.

The Traveller ran with might and main,
His speed was like the wind.
In fear and dread he heard the tread
Of the Headless One behind.

At last he sank upon a bank,
His eyes were staring wide.
His strength was gone; the Headless One
Sat suavely at his side.

'I've had a chase!' the Headless laughed,
His touch was cold as Death.
'I'll give you another,' cried out the other,
'As soon as I get my breath.'"

"But that is comic, is it not?" inquired Madame in dire perplexity. On being reassured she laughed politely and pronounced the verses more amusing than some others that the boarder with a cough recited on occasions.

"But she is comic no longer," added Madame. "She is in love."

"With whom?" cried Mopsie, giving Romance an undisputed right of way at once. Madame grew confidential, lowering her voice.

"Why, with this Mr. Lawlor," she explained. "Because he tells her how to sell her property in Porto Rico to advantage. It seems one only has to make a company to buy one's land and then one will be rich. You should ask him to make a company for your Hill."

"It would be no use," sighed Mopsie. "Sidney would only storm about and say it wasn't honest. But tell me more about Mr. Lawlor. Why, he must be fifty-five at least."

"The age of constancy," declared Madame. "It takes a man that long to find out that all women do not love him."

They talked of romance for a while and grew so deeply interested in the theme that Mr. Bullivant went down the trail not fifty yards away unnoticed. After a time the rain held up, the horizon began to brighten in the west, and they could see the black storm going on its way.

"You are a dear child, Mopsie," said Madame. "You have made me laugh with your nonsense, and laughter cheers the heart like wine."

"Madame," said Mopsie, "see, the sun is breaking through the clouds. Let us believe it is an omen."

Madame stood up and raised her hands toward the growing light as though in supplication to a deity.

"Yes, you are right," she cried in one of her unreasoning bursts of exultation. "I know that you are right."

She made a little courtesy to the sun, half comic, altogether French.

"Seigneur du ciel," she cried, "je vous salue, je vous prie!"

"Amen!" said Mopsie at her elbow, solemnly. And it was while they were thus occupied that Mr. Lawlor came in sight, running and stum-

bling up the slippery pebbles of the trail. He did not see the ladies till he came abreast of their retreat, and even then he did not check his pace.

"Ha, ha, ladies, caught in the shower? Do take my umbrella! Let me call a taxi-metre cab, eh, what?" he shouted out to them, and in another moment he was above, darting in and out among the dripping trees and grasping at the wet rocks to assist his climb.

"He is a crazy one!" commented Madame Triboulet.

"Perhaps he is looking for his friend," speculated Mopsie; for at least ten minutes must elapse before the pathway would again be passable for the thin-soled footwear of Madame.

"Ah, this Bullivant!" exclaimed the Frenchwoman. "He is so sad because there are no natives in the woods to shoot."

Mopsie laughed and said that she had only seen the expert at a distance, and Madame said that Mr. Bullivant was seen to best advantage at a distance, and there discussion of the guest of Mr. Lawlor ended. The weather was of much more vital interest; the reappearance of the birds; the probability of reaching home dry-shod.

"You will have to lunch with me," said Mopsie, "to escape the lion-hunter."

"Listen!" interposed Madame.

There were voices on the hill above them, two voices at least, growing louder every moment, one excited and commanding and the other violently protestant.

"Come along now! Step out! Don't go to sleep!"

"Ah-a-a-, sh-a-a-e, ah-a-a-a-, ba-a-a!"

"Why, it is Monsieur Lawlor!" cried the Frenchwoman, peering from the shed regardless of her hat. "He is coming back and he is dragging somebody with him by the ear."

"No, by the coat," corrected Mopsie. "And I believe—yes, I'm sure, it is that funny little naturalist."

"Then he must have been chasing the thief!—Ah, what danger!"

"I don't believe he's a thief at all," maintained Miss Beatoun. "There never was the slightest reason for thinking ill of him. The poor man is too small to be dangerous."

"Miss Beatoun, are you there?" shouted Mr. Lawlor, too much occupied with his captive and his footing to risk observation in a third direction. "Is Madame there?"

"He asks for me!" breathed Madame Triboulet. "Come, let us hide!"

"No, no, indeed!" protested Mopsie, who would not have missed the experience had Mr.

Lawlor led a painted cannibal. "Yes, we are both here," she called back, "what's the matter?"

"Nothing's the matter. Don't be frightened, ladies," Lawlor answered cheerfully. "A bit of French translation is all I want if either one of you would be so kind.—To begin with, please inform this individual that I bear him no ill-will."

In proof of his sincerity Lawlor took a firmer grip and drew his captive from the trail and through the wet grass toward the shed.

"Oh, please don't be so rough with him," Mop-sie begged, for the naturalist seemed even smaller, less significant than she remembered him, and his wrinkled little face was ashen pale. At the sound of her voice he looked up, pleased to detect in it a friendly note, and when he recognised in her the lady of the watering trough he began at once a rapid fire of explanations.

But meanwhile Lawlor never ceased to talk. He was evidently labouring under an excitement kept in bounds with difficulty. There was something to be done at once, some question to be asked and answered which would brook no delay. Miss Beatoun sought to understand no more than that an unoffending and defenceless little scientist was being badly treated on her land.

"Bon jour, monsieur," she said, determined to do all she could to make amends. She had forgotten Madame's presence for the moment, and a strange sound close behind her caused her to turn toward that lady in alarm.

It was not a cry of pain nor one of joy. It was neither laugh nor sob nor anything articulate. It had in it no sound of consonant or vowel. It was in very truth the primitive instinctive bleat of the human animal who seeks its mate; the man-call which the forests echoed once upon a time, now after a million years of desuetude a little bit disquieting. The other heard it, pricked his ears and gave the proper answering bellow in its rich primeval fullness; and Mopsie darted out into the rain to Mr. Lawlor and a modernity. This left the open shed a clear stage for a pantomime the like of which had not been seen on Heartbreak Hill since prehistoric days—and possibly not then.

Miss Beatoun feigned an interest in the shower and Mr. Lawlor bit his moustache.

"That can't be only patriotism," he said. "It must be personal."

"Of course it's personal," said Mopsie.

"But who the mischief *is* the little shrimp?" cried Lawlor.

"A scientist we all know very well," said Mopsie with much dignity.

"So well that you permit him to dig holes in your property, Miss Beatoun?"

He seemed to think the question a momentous one and waited for the answer eagerly.

"Why, yes," she said. "It does no harm. He has discovered a root growing on Heartbreak which in seven applications turns grey hair to its natural colouring. But you must not tell anybody; it's a secret."

The financier's expressive face became distorted in a hideous grimace. It was as though he had tasted of the mystic root and found it bitter.

"Hair dye!" he sputtered. "Root! Great heavens! Is that the secret?"

"Yes. Please don't mention it," said Mopsie, stealing a cautious glance across her shoulder at the shed. The Frenchman and the lady were discreetly seated with the length of Peleg's bench between them.

"We might go back and talk to them," suggested Mopsie.

Lawlor gave vent to an almost maniacal laugh.

"Thanks awfully!" he drawled. "I rather think that I'll be strolling home to lunch. Guest on my hands, you understand, Miss Beatoun—claims of hospitality—eh, what? Hair dye, I think you said?"

"I think it's more a restorative," Mopsie explained.

"Capital!" cried Mr. Lawlor. "Fine! My compliments to the charming lady and the long lost—brother, shall we say? Eh, what? Put me down for a dozen of the large size, packed for shipment."

Mr. Lawlor laughed again, and laughing strode away, taking a long diagonal through the wet grass to the downward trail. As his broad back disappeared among the trees the voice of Madame sounded jubilantly from the shed.

"Mopsie, my child, come here. Come here and rejoice," she cried. "Adolphe, my beloved, pants to kiss your hand."

CHAPTER XVIII



IF the Wixom latch-string did not hang upon the outside it was because no guest could ever have reached forth a hand to grasp it before the door itself flew open to receive him. Nor was the welcome of the old place written on the door-mat, to be taken in at night or reversed in rainy weather. It shone from every window; it was stamped and burnt in every brick; and when the master of the house pronounced the word it seemed a covenant.

The Colonel was a man who—never having asked favours for himself—had failed to learn the formula of refusal, and the wanderers of the highway, though they understood this weakness, slept and ate and on the morrow took the road without abusing it.

“A dollar makes a traveller, the want of it a tramp,” he said, and his theories had infected all his household; it had become a family maxim that “a well-fed wolf is far less dangerous than

a hungry dog," and never man nor dog had gone in hunger from his gate. Therefore it caused the Colonel no surprise to perceive his niece and Madame Triboulet apparently driving before them as a prize the wet and shivering foreigner.

"Come in this door," he called out from the rose-hung battlements whence he had been watching, and Mopsie led the way while Madame boldly took the stranger's arm and followed.

"Don't ask a single question till he's dry," the leader whispered. "I think he should go right to bed and have a glass of something very hot."

The Colonel winked and promptly disappeared, for there were certain acts of hospitality which he never delegated.

He had a deed to draw that day, the passing of a complicated title involving endless signatures and the presence of a numerous family connection bound to make the most of the event. The afternoon was well upon its way before he was again reminded of his guest by two meek, penitential figures at his study door.

"Come in," he said, "and tell me all about your patient."

"He is asleep now," said Mopsie, "but I'm afraid he is not very well, though he has taken everything Aunt Lydia could think of."

"Such kindness!" murmured Madame Tri-boulet, touching her eyelids lightly with an infantile mouchoir.

"Madame has something to tell you, Uncle Abner," explained Mopsie, "something very serious and important."

"But I do not know how to begin," confessed the Frenchwoman.

"Then let us begin by making ourselves as comfortable as possible," said the Colonel.

After an all unnecessary rearrangement of the chairs and the clearing his desk of its accumulated papers, he told them with a kindly humour something of his rural clients and their ways. He closed a window where the breeze came in too freely, and opened wide another looking on a pleasant summer world of birds and trees.

"And now if I may light my pipe," he said, "we will have a cosy little chat. Get me the matches, Mopsie."

"Let me do that," protested Madame, moving swiftly to the mantelpiece. "And if I may," she added, "I should like to stand behind your chair to speak."

"Of course," assented Colonel Wixom, "I was about to suggest that very thing. Mopsie shall sit facing me and you shall talk to her across my head."

"Oh, please——" began Miss Beatoun.

"Sit down, child, and behave yourself," said

her uncle, and the child obeyed reluctantly. It was not at all her idea of the way proceedings of a solemn nature should be conducted, but presently she was much relieved to find that Madame disregarded her completely.

The Frenchwoman had chosen the darkest corner of the room, and stood erect with folded hands and eyes uplifted to a pallid bust of truthful Washington above the door.

"In the first place," she began quite softly, "I am a liar."

Mopsie blinked, but held her peace; the Colonel sat immovable.

"I am a liar," Madame continued, "because I am not a widow, and I am not a widow because my husband is not dead."

This disclosure would have been too much for any sympathetic listener, and it was far too much for Mopsie, who was on her feet at once.

"I knew it!" she cried, "I was sure of it."

The Colonel rose and, going to the open window, smoked for full five minutes. When he turned again, Madame was in his arm-chair, sobbing softly, and Miss Beatoun sat beside her on the floor.

"I congratulate you," he said, standing before them, "because I see the story is to have a happy ending."

"But it is a miserable story, a very miserable story," said Madame, and summoning all her

fortitude, she went on: "My husband, my poor husband, has been in prison."

"But he was innocent, I'm sure!" cried Mopsie, rising to her knees.

"He broke the law," confessed Madame, "but he knew no better."

"Tell us the story," said the Colonel, and Madame told her story to the bust of Washington.

"He is an educated man," she said, "a scientifically educated man, but he had never learned the art of making money, and that is the most important of all arts."

The Colonel bowed his head in reverence to a mighty truism.

"We tried so many things," went on the Frenchwoman, "but nothing paid. We built a furnace for assaying minerals, a laboratory for distilling essences, but neither paid, and then we put what we had left in olive oil, and lost it all, and then—and then we tried to save ourselves——"

"How?" asked the Colonel as Madame hesitated.

"By making whiskey in our still," she said at length, "just a little whiskey on the sly for friends."

"On the sly?" repeated Colonel Wixom, and for the moment even Mopsie wavered in her faith.

"Yes," explained Madame. "That means you do not have your name upon the label; they told us it would be all right."

"Who told you?" asked the Colonel.

"The gentlemen who bought our whiskey. But it seems they did not know the law though they had been in the business for years."

"A gang of scoundrels!" commented Colonel Wixom, and Mopsie said, "Of course they were!"

The rest of Madame's story told of the discovery following in the natural order of things:—a raid by the police, a trial, conviction, and a three years' sentence for the old offenders and the little foreigner alike. But this was not the limit of unfairness. After a few months the others through some legal quibble obtained their freedom. He remained—"because he did not know the law," she said.

"Had you no lawyer?" asked the Colonel.

"Yes," was the simple answer, "but we had no money."

Nor was the element of comedy missing from the story. Adolphe, resigned to serve his sentence of three years, was one day without warning turned loose upon the world—a reward for good behaviour, they told him, but to him it was the hardest punishment of all. Equipped with a small sum of money and a suit of clothes he had

come as far as Walton, only to find his name—which did not happen to be Triboulet—unknown, and Madame in her regular visits to the prison had never thought it necessary to mention Beattoun's Bridge. He had taken refuge in the small Italian colony of the town, and by good fortune stumbled on employment of an indefinite sort. Madame was vague upon this point, as there had been so little time for revelations, but she knew that it was something calling into play his scientific knowledge, which by an odd chance had sent him to the slopes of Heartbreak Hill.

"He has told me very little yet," she said, "but to-day when he was digging in the ground for roots a large man sprang upon him and took away his box of specimens."

"Why, that was Mr. Lawlor," Mopsie cried.

"No," said Madame, "it was another, for Mr. Lawlor did not spring on him till later."

"Then it must have been Mr. Bullivant."

"Doubtless," said Madame, "but Adolphe will tell us everything when he wakes."

"They both supposed that they had caught a dangerous outlaw," said the Colonel, taking up his pipe again. "But we will prove, Madame, that they were wrong; yes, and we shall have Monsieur upon his feet before you know it, and everything shall turn out like one of Mopsie's fairy tales." When he had lighted a fresh corn-

cob of tobacco he went on, laughing softly through the smoke, "You must know, Madame, that Mopsie's stories always ended well no matter what the book might say."

"It was you who taught me that, Uncle," his niece protested. "I never should have dared to make all the wicked ones reform. They don't in real life."

"No," sighed Madame; "real life is very hard and relentless."

The Colonel drew a light chair nearer and sat down.

"We must plan a happy ending for your story, my good friend," he said.

"Ah, that would not be easy, I'm afraid."

"Shall we let Mopsie try?" he asked, and Madame smiled a grave assent.

"It seems to me," said Mopsie, who had thought the matter out in every detail long before, "that they must be engaged—that would explain—well, it would explain a good deal, and then of course, Madame, having been married before, would not want a big wedding, so it would be very natural for them to elope and come back married——"

"Then it would not be necessary to tell all the world about the prison?" cried Madame, and two pairs of anxious eyes were fixed upon the Colonel's face.

"Not in the least," was the decision, and the lawyer added, "As for Mopsie's plan, I only ask to hear no more of it until it is carried out."

"But do you think it utterly absurd?" cried Mopsie.

"Yes; and therefore rather likely to succeed," replied her uncle, and this wise conclusion brought the conference to an end.

CHAPTER XIX



R. SAMUEL STITES had thoroughly made up his mind, and as he gazed about on long familiar scenes he was surprised to see how vastly different everything appeared when once the moral atmosphere has been blown clear of mist. To his left across the crowded city avenue there rose a steeple. An ordinary everyday church steeple, upholding an ordinary four-faced clock, it had seemed to him before his mind was thoroughly made up. Now he perceived that the steeple pointed heavenward; that the clock was busily engaged in measuring hours and minutes ceaselessly. These were such beautiful and inspiring thoughts that he almost wondered that some poet fellow had not worked them into verse.—To his left tall buildings in a row looked down upon the ebb and flow of restless multitudes below. They watched the people come and go like some resistless undertow, now fast, now slow, ah, who can know? Whoa there! Pegasus, whoa! It is not fair to joggle a beginner so!—

"By Jove!" reflected Mr. Stites, "it comes right off the bat. You can't stop it when once you begin to think that way." And he wisely decided not to think that way soon again if he could help it.

The shop behind him bore a name known the world over wherever women dream of diamonds, and in his pockets were three little boxes all so very much alike that he had thought it best to set on each a cryptic mark of recognition. Of course such secrets should remain inviolate, but if one were to guess the letter 'A' to indicate the rapturous word 'Accepted,' or interpret 'D. D.' as 'Decision deferred,' or read in 'F' mere 'Friendship,' that elusive spark apt equally to kindle or go out when blown upon, one might not have been altogether wrong. Mr. Stites was a young gentleman of business training, and it may have pleased him to arrange his tokens of affection according to a sliding scale. At all events in offering his heart to Miss Beatoun of the Bridge the lady was to be given her choice between an option and immediate possession, and surely delicacy could go no farther.

His feelings towards his future bride, if such she were to be, were of a sort to make him think the better of himself. Even the slight concession they involved on his part was ennobling. He might have done a little better socially. He

might have married directly into the smarter set or at least into the waiting list, and acquired at once a large and desirable assortment of acquaintances. But instead he was content to begin life modestly in the biggest of the big hotels, where with patience her beauty—supplemented by his taste in dress—would win eventual recognition. Of course Miss Beatoun possessed two advantages; she had no near relation, rich or poor, to direct the blighting eye of criticism toward himself, and she would have one hundred thousand dollars, practically a gift from him. And besides all this, he loved her deeply and sincerely. He could not think of her without delicious thrills, and the money seemed to him so many golden roses won for her by knightly deeds. He had been authorised to pay for Heartbreak Hill 'a hundred thousand or as much thereof as might be needed,' and he had thoroughly made up his mind that every roseleaf should be hers—and his.

The train that bore him back to Walton seemed to vibrate with the runic rhymes of Chivalry—not unmixed with business,—to sing of prowess exercised with practical results.

At the station Knighthood cast a cautious eye along the platform lest one unhorsed foe had revived sufficiently to attempt another joust. He

was not even sure that Sidney Beatoun knew that he had been unhorsed. But all was clear, serene and smiling, and a glimpse of Mopsie's pony before the postoffice brought sweet assurance that his lady had not grieved too sorely in his absence.

A lover of the tactless sort might have presented himself all luggage-laden and travel-stained and claimed at once a wanderer's welcome. But Mr. Stites was conscious of the value of externals, and he had brought a tender necktie specially for a meeting. He had ordered the red car by telegraph, and by acting promptly he could overtake her in Heartbreak woods, swoop down upon her unaware and perhaps surprise the flush of pleasure he so well remembered. Perhaps she would allow the Porcupine to take the mail ahead for once while he and she came on more slowly with the pony.—A lover's dreams, how strange it seems! turn naturally to purling streams, where every breeze that stirs the trees brings back sweet memories of—of—confound it! bees! It was pleasant to be back again, pleasant to sniff the wholesome country air; pleasant even to be told that Jones had not been seen about the Painless Parlours for two days.

"Don't ask me what that fresh kid has been about," the Porcupine requested. "I have had all I could do to exercise the car."

"Exercise the car?" repeated Mr. Stites, uncertain that he heard aright.

"Yes; I was bound to get those pump checks working right before you came back," said the chauffeur simply, and there was something rather touching in this proof of his fidelity.

"And are they working right?" their owner asked.

"Fair," said the Porcupine, but 'fair' was praise extravagant from him. "I guess they'll hold out now till we get a chance to have a general overhauling, but the vapouriser nozzle caps they sent us are no good on earth; and them new shoes are wearing through already. Sand's worse than broken glass for ties, and the headlights both went out on me the other night when I was testing them. I had to catch a pair of lightning bugs to get me nome. The tubing must be leaking; a livery stable ain't no place to keep a car; the smell of horses is corroding. And the oil you get down here ain't fit for Sunday-school salad. I got the blacksmith to fix up that subburner, but he made such a rotten job of it that I telegraphed for another, and if you are not going to use the car for a day or two——"

"I shall want to use the car now right along," announced the broker. "Turn to the right," he added, as they reached the bifurcation of the road. "The lower way is not so sandy."

The Porcupine unwillingly obeyed.

"Mud is worse than sand for tires," he explained. "There seems to be some sort of acid in it that disintegrates the rubber."

The red car took the turn toward the right and in a moment, swerving to the left, swept into Heartbreak woods. The Porcupine, letting on more power, played an obligato with his feet upon the horn.

—"Blow, bugle, blow, set the wild echoes flying"—

were the words that came to Mr. Stites' mind, and he was almost certain they were not his own. But it was a good line all the same, and so was its successor in the couplet which he presently recalled:

—"For that same flower which blows to-day, to-morrow,
may be dying—"

On second thought he realised that the flower ought to bloom, not to blow, in order to prevent confusion of ideas. There was no reason why a business man should not appreciate the finer points in literature. In married life books must be almost necessary to lend variety in conversation. He wondered if Miss Beatoun cared for books—Scott, or that other chap who wrote those Indian yarns, none of your pernicious Frenchy



At Pierrot's head a large ferocious person grasped the bridle.



modern trash. Neat bindings make a room look cosy, homelike and refined. He wished that he had thought of bringing her a book. Poetry would have been just the thing; Omar What's His Name, that Persian buck,—‘a jug of water in the shade’—Oh, Lord, why had it not occurred to him?

“Tire trouble ahead, I guess,” remarked the Porcupine with the cheerfulness such incidents inspire in the breasts of the unpunctured. “No, nothing doing,” he said, sadly, as the car sped on. “It’s just a horse.” And Mr. Stites rose in the tonneau for a better view.

Far down the road but every second nearer stood the yellow buckboard, and in it sat Miss Beatoun holding fast to Bill, whose frantic shrieks for freedom rent the air. At Pierrot’s head a large, ferocious person grasped the bridle. A slouched hat hid his face; a handkerchief was tied about his chin, and he either wore a mask or he had blackened rings about his eyes. He was a desperate-looking character and not alone, for from the lower branches of a beech-tree hung the legs and feet of an accomplice whose upper parts were hidden by thick leaves. Miss Beatoun was apparently engaged in argument—so far as Bill permitted—for she waved her whip as though there was a squadron of defenders at her back.

"Blow your horn!" commanded Mr. Stites, and the red car darted to the rescue like a thing of life, if thing of life could cover ground so swiftly.

"Honk! Honk! Honk!" At the first sound the masked man gave a spring that must have landed him in Roundabout if not upon the farther bank.

"Honk!" The legs with equal promptness disappeared from view among the foliage.

"Honk! Honk!" The chauffeur shut off his power and with the foot brake brought the red car to a stop, while Mr. Stites, having from the tonneau looked about him cautiously for a foe, made a successful vault across the door to Mop-sie's side. The pony shook himself and sighed until the harness rattled, for he disapproved of such things happening in Heartbreak woods. Bill yelled afresh, and being freed failed signally in an attempt to climb the beech tree. Miss Beattoun laughed, a mirthless little laugh, with lips drawn tight across her teeth, and at first her hands refused to gather up the fallen reins. She clutched the mail-bag on her knees as though it were a life-preserver. It was some minutes before she could explain exactly what had happened.

She had been waylaid; held up by highway-men whose object was to rob the mail. They

had been insistent but not threatening. And she had not been frightened for herself, only on Bill's account, because they might have shot him had she let him go. Besides, she had thought it best to keep him at her side. It was difficult to refrain from laughing, and when she made the effort her teeth kept up an intermittent chattering—from nervousness, she insisted, not from fright. They had wanted nothing but the mail-bag, she was sure of that.

Stites, who had never before seen a lady threatened with hysteria, regarded her in consternation.

"Then why didn't you let them take the old bag?" he inquired.

"Oh, I should never have done that. They might have killed me first," she said, and beyond all doubt the Beatoun carrier, there under her own wild mountain with only Roundabout to tell the story, would have answered with her life in defence of a handful of postal cards, a catalogue or two for Peleg Prout, and one very large registered envelope addressed to Mr. Frederick Lawlor.

"It is such a poor little mail," she said, "I wonder why they wanted it."

"You must really let me drive you home," Mr. Stites suggested, not without a certain chastened admiration for the rough and ready ways of

Providence. "Suppose we put the mail-bag in the car and send it on ahead," he added as though it were an absolutely newborn thought.

"That's the idea," chimed in the Porcupine. "And the best thing the young lady can do is to hop in here along with it."

Often before could Mr. Stites have wished the Porcupine deprived of speech, but never so devoutly.

"Of course, if you prefer," he faltered, "but perhaps a little rest——"

"No, no," she said, "I want to get my letters into Uncle Abner's hands as soon as possible."

Stites found his only crumb of consolation in the pressure of her hand upon his arm. It seemed to him a mute expression of her firm reliance on his strength; her way, he thought, of showing confidence and gratitude. Another girl might have paid him compliments—overdue—upon the rescue; might have spoken of his bravery and courage there in the presence of a carping listener. But Mopsie's way was very much the best, and when—in some sweet coming moment—she should call him her Preserver he would answer with a hero's modesty. The little boxes in his pockets made sharp dents in his anatomy as he held her just a little tighter than necessity demanded.

"I am ashamed of being such a baby," she

declared, finding the step almost beyond her strength.

The sight of her seated in his tonneau thrilled him with a new sensation of proprietary pride. The background of a motor car has much the same effect on womankind that evening dress is said to have on men—it makes vulgarities, if they exist, apparent, and Mopsie, Mr. Stites was kind enough to fancy, stood the test.

"Give me my mail-bag, please," she said. "And, by the way, I have not thanked you yet."

"Don't mention it," protested Mr. Stites. "I have done nothing, absolutely nothing."

"Oh, yes, you have," she said. "You are lending me your car and you are going now to drive my pony home. It's really very kind."

Of course she might have added then and there a word or two about his daring dash to her relief, and Mr. Stites was justified in saying somewhat coldly, as he did:

"Oh, that's all right. I'll follow you at once."

"Unless you mean to stop behind and lick that fellow up the tree?" put in the Porcupine, and with a heavenward glance into the beech leaves he added, "If I'm not colour-blind I think I know them pants."

"Oh, please don't fight," cried Mopsie, sinking back upon the cushions. "Please, please don't,"

she repeated as the face of Mr. Stites appeared to recede from her and grow small as a face seen through an opera glass reversed. Even when he sprang upon the footboard he seemed still a great way off.

"Water!" he demanded. "Water! or she will faint."

"Well," said the Porcupine, "the river is full of water."

There were silver cups in the equipment of the car, and seizing one of these, Stites would have started for the bank of Roundabout had he not suddenly recalled the larger highwayman.

"Wait!" he said, hesitating for a moment.

"Wait nothing!" said the Porcupine as he pressed his feet upon the lever and threw off the brake.

"Hold on!" cried Mr. Stites.

"Hold nothing!" said the Porcupine, opening the throttle, and in another instant it would have taken good eyes indeed to read the number of the red car as it sped upon its way to Beattoun's Bridge.

Bill's mind was in a state of turbulent uncertainty. Divided responsibilities had been thrust upon him. All natural inclinations drew him toward the highwayman; stern duty pointed to the undefended vehicle, and like the conscientious beast he was he chose the task least pleas-

ing to himself. With one regretful growl he leaped upon the buckboard seat.

"Good old Bill! We are both of us deserted, aren't we?" began Mr. Stites, softened by common misfortune toward a creature he detested in his heart. "Nice dog," he added in the hearty manner of an old and trusted friend.

The nice dog showed two rows of teeth remarkably developed for his size.

Stites snapped his fingers as he came nearer.

"Fine chap!" he said a little doubtfully.

The fine chap's hair rose in a brindled ridge along his spine.

The broker laid a cautious hand upon the pony's bit.

Bill barked, but did not leave the seat, and Stites by way of an experiment drew Pierrot toward him. The pony followed willingly enough, and the dog, assenting to a compromise, sat down upon the cushion and grinned. Long training had taught Bill to hold the buckboard—in its owner's absence—to the death, but it was not his business if the pony showed a craven spirit of docility.

"I'll get even with you one of these days, you whelp, and you can bet your crooked tail on that!" said Mr. Stites across his shoulder, and the whelp took up the wager with a wink of his left eye, which was pink.

The road was soft and damp in spots, and Mr. Stites' long dust coat flapped about his knees, impeding progress. The evening had grown sultry and the pony's taste for juicy leaves had certain disadvantages for one obliged to lead him by the bit. It was not a pleasant position to be placed in, not a dignified position for any gentleman of independent income and a Bradstreet rating, but Love, whose logic justifies so many inconveniences, supported Mr. Stites in this. And it gave him melancholy solace to find himself thus included in the common lot of lovers—so long as there were no spectators.

“Would ever any ill befall if woman did not start the ball?” he mused, his thoughts once more attuned to rhyme. He had a plan of tying Pierrot to a tree and sending back the Porcupine to fetch him. He had several plans for vengeance upon Bill, the best of which involved a present to Miss Beatoun of a superior dog, a prize winner of quite another breed.

Meanwhile more water had passed under Beatoun Bridge than Mr. Stites in his preoccupation realised, and when a turning in the road revealed the sun well down toward the horizon he would have gone on at a faster gait had such a thing been possible. But the pony when not dragged stood still, while Bill evinced no dis-

position to relent, and Stites had half determined to abandon both when the appearance of a rustic figure coming toward him caused him to suspend his purpose. Perhaps relief was on the way; perhaps he had not been forgotten altogether.

"Why don't you get in and ride?" inquired the newcomer.

"Because I much prefer to walk," replied Mr. Stites. He remembered vaguely having seen the big Van Buskirk boy before, and in this belief Bill's yelps of recognition bore him out. If indeed the lad had been despatched upon a serious errand he must have permitted other interests to divert him from it, for beneath his jacket was a living rabbit whose head protruded just above the upper button.

"What became of the fellow up the tree?" inquired the boy.

"So you were a witness to the hold-up, were you?" said the broker.

"No," said the boy, "but Mopsie told us all about it when she came back in the bubble."

"And can you tell me where the bubble, as you call it, is at present?" Mr. Stites demanded, coldly, for he did not like the boy's familiar manner.

"Up to the Colonel's when I seen it last," was

the reply. "I guess the shuffer must have busted something on the bridge. I tell you he was going some."

"And you were sent to tell me, I suppose?" suggested Mr. Stites.

"No," the big Van Buskirk boy answered, "I wasn't, and I ain't obleeged to tell you nothing now." For there was that in Mr. Stites' tone that had aroused his animosity.

"What was Miss Beatoun doing when you left?" The tone was more conciliatory.

"Goin' to bed, I guess."

"And what did people say when they were told about the—the rescue?"

"Nothin'. Just laughed."

"Impossible!" cried Mr. Stites. "Two desperate highwaymen——"

"They wasn't," interposed the boy. "They was just two factory fellows on a lark. But when we hunt 'em out we'll duck 'em good, you bet your life!"

As the boy chuckled the long ears which made a sort of necktie at his throat grew agitated, and the sight drove Bill to frenzy, awakening every latent sporting instinct in his brindled breast.

"Do you think that feller's up the tree yet?" asked the boy.

"So far as I know," answered Mr. Stites.

"I guess I'll go and have a look at him."

"Wouldn't you rather earn a dollar by taking this horse home?"

"No, I wouldn't."

The captive, who though a rabbit was no fool, had by this time scented danger imminent and began to struggle with the strength of desperation to be free. A button of the imprisoning jacket flew. Another started. A streak of grey and white flashed for a moment in the air, touched ground between the pony's feet, and shot into the wayside bushes with Bill in hot pursuit. Later the renegade would be covered with shame as with a garment. He would shrink before the eyes of men, too base a thing to wag a tail, but his fall from grace was Mr. Stites' opportunity. The broker made one bound into the buckboard, took up the reins, and grasped the whip.

"Hold on a minute!" said the big Van Buskirk boy. "If you should ever want another shuffer, I might take the job."

"Go to the deuce!" responded Mr. Stites, while Pierrot needed no persuasion to be off toward home and supper in the regulation way.

CHAPTER XX



It was not until the following afternoon that Mr. Stites again had speech with Mopsie, and by that time he would have been glad indeed could the episode of Heartbreak woods be blotted from the page of history altogether. But it was she who would not let the subject pass into oblivion.

"It must have been more serious than I thought," she said, "because my uncle has forbidden me to drive alone, and he has telegraphed my cousin to come home at once."

"I wish that I might be of some assistance," he faltered, looking down into the lining of his hat where the initials S. S. afforded little inspiration.

"But you did everything possible at the time," she declared in tones which would the day before have given him exquisite joy. "It was your arrival that frightened off those desperate characters."

"Desperate characters who had evidently learnt the trade of highwaymen from moving

pictures," he sneered. It was odd that, seated near her on the lilac bench, noting the glimmer of her hair against the green, the modelling of her firm young shoulder beneath its summer drapery, the play of warm blood that the sun-tan could not hide across her cheek, his thoughts no longer came to him in rhyme. It was odd indeed that he should have wished his little boxes safely back in the glass cases they had so adorned. But somehow he could no longer picture Mopsie as brightening at the sight of them. Here in her breeze-blown garden it was borne in upon him that should she ever grow enraptured over diamonds it would be because she cared so much for the giver that any other pebbles would serve quite as well. And the giver—on this point Mr. Stites had thoroughly made up his mind—the giver must be first of all an honest man.

But this is not to say that Mr. Stites had in the least abandoned hope. He was willing, more than willing, to do anything to make himself more worthy. He was prepared for her sweet sake to become a Second Adventist, a vegetarian or an eschewer of sack, if only Jones the office boy got safely out of Beatoun County, and Mr. Sidney Beatoun failed to receive his telegram, and Mr. Bullivant did not betray himself. During a midnight interview, by no means painless, with young Jones in the Dental Parlours, he had

learnt more of Bullivant than strictly honest people care to know of knaves. He had in truth become what a narrow-minded country lawyer such as Colonel Wixom might term an accessory after the fact. But that had all been several hours before his change of heart. Such things were of the past. Now even if he paid Mopsie more money than he need for Heartbreak Hill the act would not be quite dishonest, for the property must possess a value. Bullivant was clever and knew what he was doing, Bullivant was without sentiment, Bullivant was keen and recognised a good thing when he saw one. To Mr. Stites' high resolves he added one more: to question Mr. Bullivant, if ever an opportunity presented itself.

"Miss Beatoun, may I speak of business for a moment?" he said, humbly.

"No," answered Mopsie with decision. "You may not. Remember, if you please, that I am still an interesting invalid."

"Not *invalid*," protested Mr. Stites with meaning emphasis.

Mopsie pretended to be puzzled by the answer for a moment, and she was never prettier than when pretending to be puzzled.

"Oh, that was rather neat," she said at length. "You should be rewarded with a lump of sugar if I had one."

"Please give me anything that you have touched," the young man begged, and stretching forth her hand she picked a wax berry, large and round and white, from a shrub that kept a treasury of such pearls in stock, and held it out to him.

"Of course it isn't very much," she apologised, regarding him at the same time from beneath her eyelids mockingly.

He seized the gem, but knowing little of its nature seized it with such ardour that it burst; exploded with a small report—ah, luckless omen!—and Miss Beatoun laughed.

"Do give me another one," he pleaded.

"Not till you have earned it." There was a challenge in her voice and her smile was wilfully provoking.

"May I have all I earn?" he asked, so seriously that the Devil tempted her to go a little, just a little farther. She was fully conscious of the wrong she did, but Mopsie was a woman first of all, and in the age-old game they played, the score stood woefully against her side. She allowed the dimple on her cheek to deepen; she let her lower lip prepare itself to pout. The breeze blew loose a shining lock, but that was really accidental.—Ah, lady, for thy love the stars cry out above! The flowers and all things fair send up one prayer!—His eyes had become

round as gooseberries and she could hear him breathe.

"Oh, dear me!" cried Mopsie, frightened by the genii she had raised. "I had nearly forgotten that I am to make the salad dressing."

"Please don't go away just yet," he said, almost as though he had a right to keep her there.

"Indeed I must!" She sprang up nervously and shook out the white folds of her dress.

"You shan't until I tell you something," he declared, planting himself directly in her path.

"Don't tell me now, I really haven't time to listen," Mopsie answered, trying hard to laugh, for he had been invited by Aunt Lydia to remain to dinner as a special recognition of the rescue. Perhaps, being a woman, she might have let him say his say, and told herself that she was not to blame when he had left her with the longings of his heart unsatisfied. But to suffer him to start upon his homeward journey dinnerless?—never that!—being a woman.

"I have got to tell you if I die for it," said Mr. Stites, advancing slowly toward her where she stood fairly cornered by the lilacs and the bench. The Serpent who had led her into mischief seemed to have for once neglected to support a friend, but even then her chief thought was for Aunt Lydia's famous chicken pie. Hearts

heal, Love's hopes will swell again like wax-berries, but chicken pies are broken only once.

"Mr. Stites," she said, "do you want me to be very much offended?" She had never looked more serious, more profoundly moved. Her calm eyes met the ardent gooseberries with such soft appeal that no one in the world would have suspected her of planning for the last extremity a vault across the low back of the bench.

Mr. Stites drew one deep breath of resignation, but failed to mention that the Colonel had appeared upon the porch.

"It shall be as you wish," he said, "but may I tell you sometime, very soon?"

"Oh, yes," she answered. "Certainly."

"After dinner?"

Mopsie nodded.

"Thank you," he said, softly. "Thank you, Mopsie." And Miss Beatoun as she hung her head resolved never again to save the best pie ever made at such a cost.

As they strolled toward the house, conversing amiably and laughing over much, they met the Colonel and the gentleman from Mumford's Mills who looked in profile like a sunfish. Behind them came a Mr. Daniel Dunker, land buyer for the Trolley Company, who wore an alpaca overcoat, chiefly for its pockets, which were stuffed with papers.

"I wish to speak to you a moment, Mopsie," said her uncle, and Mr. Stites—feigning a tactful interest in sundials—strode away.

Miss Beatoun declared that she was glad to meet the gentlemen, but this was farther on the road to friendship than either of the gentlemen cared to venture. The hand of the Sunfish felt like a yam, the other made one think of cold asparagus.

"These gentlemen have come to speak about the Hill," said Uncle Abner. "As you know, Mopsie, they have offered twenty thousand dollars."

"Money," put in the Sunfish, who occupied some minor post of profit because it was impolitic to leave out so cantankerous a citizen.

"Real money," echoed Mr. Daniel Dunker.

"They thought there might be questions you would like to ask," went on the Colonel.

"Oh, no, I'll leave it all to you and Sidney," Mopsie protested.

"But it is only right that you should understand in a general way what they think of doing," said her uncle.

"I don't care what they do, I really don't," she pleaded, while Mr. Dunker with a tolerant smile took out a folded paper from his pocket.

"If you would kindly step this way, miss," he remarked, "I'll tell you all about it in a jiffy."

He spread out a large diagram upon the rustic table, and Mopsie's first impression was that they intended to paint Heartbreak Hill a livid blue. But Mr. Dunker, who was in the real estate business, was an adept at elucidating diagrams. Using his longest spear of cold asparagus he made a sweeping circuit of the map.

"That white line represents the boundary," he explained. "That there is Beatoun's half and this half nearest's yourn."

"I understand," said Mopsie, gravely but untruthfully.

"This double line's the Scenic Railway," he went on, "and this here loop we call The Loop, because—because that's what it is."

"Of course," assented Mopsie.

"Now here——" the spear descended on the centre—"right on the very top——"

"I know!—A goat's milk cure!" Miss Beatoun interrupted. From the corner of her eye she saw that Mrs. Dacer and the boarder with a cough had come into the garden under convoy of the financier. Mrs. Dacer generally happened in when anything unusual was afoot.

"We have about given up the goat's milk idea," said the trolley man, "and substituted soda water."

"I should think a soda water cure would be more popular," remarked Miss Beatoun rather

absently, for Mr. Bullivant was steaming close behind the other party, and Mr. Stites would have gone to join him had not her uncle intervened and introduced the Sunfish, who said something which made the others laugh. Later she learnt that the remark was this:

"I tell you what, Colonel, in my time gals signed papers or they didn't, just as they was told."

"And right here where that old coasting shed stands," said the trolley man, "we propose to build——"

"You can't," Miss Beatoun interrupted. "We will not allow any one to disturb our shed. We like it as it is."

"But——" said the trolley man, displaying faulty though persuasive teeth.

"I will not hear another word about it," Mopsie cried, so loud that Mr. Lawlor, who had been hovering near, felt justified in coming nearer.

"Eh, what?" he said. "Plans for a Recreation Park? Bump the bumps and shoot the shoots and all the rest of it? That's the scheme, is it?"

"Not at all," replied Miss Beatoun. "I shall not allow it."

"Right you are!" cried Mr. Lawlor. "Neither would I."

"What business is this of yours, sir?" put in Mr. Dunker, warmly.

"Any man of cultivated taste is entitled to an opinion," said the financier.

"And who's to prove that yours is such?" demanded Mr. Dunker with befitting spirit.

"Don't have to prove it. I admit it," returned Lawlor flippantly, and farther altercation might have followed had not Mrs. Dacer and the boarder come up at the moment to express their joy at seeing Mopsie none the worse for her adventure, and ask with neighbourly concern how fared the other patient, the naturalist. Monsieur was nearly well, they heard with pleasure, and the doctor was permitting him to come down that day to dinner if he felt inclined. Peaches were getting ripe. The Ackerman baby was of course a girl, as they always were. The Mountain Whist party had gone off with great *éclat*, but Mopsie had been missed. That little difference between L. and B. had been made up, and they were friends again. So nice, because they were both such dears.

"Soon as you're ready I am," said the Sunfish to the trolley man.

"But perhaps there may be something else Miss Beatoun does not understand," the trolley man suggested.

"By Gorry!" wheezed the Sunfish. "Why don't you ask her plumb out if she means to sell the darned old Hill for twenty thousand or not?"

"The price is utterly ridiculous," observed Lawlor, with his most offensive drawl. "It is worth a great deal more."

"Why don't you offer it then?" the Sunfish taunted him.

"I may," retorted Lawlor.

"How much more?"

"Oh, I don't know—a thousand or so."

"I'll cover that and stop your bluffing," said the trolley agent. "Twenty-two."

"Twenty-five," said Lawlor promptly.

"I'll bet a dollar you can't show the money," interposed the Sunfish.

They stood in a circle about the rustic table and the plan of Heartbreak Hill—Dunker and the Sunfish, Lawlor with his sister and the boarder with a cough, and presently to these were added Stites and Bullivant.

Mr. Lawlor grew excited.

"The money will be ready at the proper time," he said.

The trolley representative folded up his map.

"All right. As far as we're concerned, the Hill is yours," he said in accents of finality. "It isn't worth a penny more to us."

"Gentlemen," put in Colonel Wixom, "while I do not consider words spoken in the heat of argument to be of binding force, believe me I cannot allow our interests to be trifled with."

"I'll stand by what I say," cried Mr. Lawlor, bringing his knuckles down upon the table with a blow that must have hurt.

"If that's the game," announced the lion-hunter, "I'll come in, and you can put my offer down at twenty-six."

It was then that Bill and Peleg came from behind the house to join the audience.

"Geewhillikens!" breathed Peleg Prout as Mr. Bullivant repeated "Twenty-six!" distinctly.

Mr. Stites took off his hat.

"My offer is the same," he said, "but understand, please, that I only want the half that skirts the river."

"Mopsie's half?" cried Mrs. Dacer, quite forgetting where she was.

"My goodness!" gasped the boarder with a cough.

The Colonel flushed and looked about him angrily, for it struck him that the offer had been made for something other than the Hill. But speaking with the utmost dignity and self-control, he said:

"Will you explain, sir, why you bid for only half the Heartbreak property?"

"I can't explain," said Mr. Stites. "I'm acting for a client, and upon my word, that's all he wants."

"Perhaps he has discovered the Spanish Treasure?" piped up Mrs. Dacer.

"Or the Mammoth?" put in Peleg with a chuckle.

Mr. Bullivant smiled a grim and comprehending smile.

"Thirty for the river half!" he said.

"Thirty thousand dollars for the river half?" repeated the real estate specialist, who rarely in a long experience of country auctions had heard so large an offer. The blood of battle stirred beneath his alpaca overcoat and instinctively he took command. "If we're to be knocked out on this," he added, "it's got to be done regular.—Ten per cent. up in the Walton National Bank or no sale."

Mr. Bullivant smiled confidently. Stites looked unconcerned. Mr. Lawlor seemed about to enter a protest until the boarder coughed and touched his arm in secret. Then he also smiled and said:

"Reasonable enough for any one. Thirty, eh, what? Well, faint heart never yet filled a spade flush. I'll make it thirty-three for luck."

The boarder clapped her hands and ran behind the big horse-chestnut tree to cough.

"You are all plumb crazy," said the Sunfish, blinking.

Mopsie and her uncle stood apart, bareheaded

in the evening sunlight, watching the group about the table; he calmly and judicially, she with juvenile delight in the excitement.

"It would be such fun," she said, "if Sidney could be here to see it."

"Thirty-three!" the auctioneer repeated. "Do I hear the four?"

"Of course," said Mr. Stites, who of all the circle seemed the least insane.

"Five!" put in Mr. Lawlor, and thereupon Mr. Bullivant said:

"Six!" It was like a game.

"Forty!" said Mr. Stites.

Mrs. Dacer jumped as though her toes had been supplied with springs. If her wonderful brother had not bid again immediately she must inevitably have done so.

"Fifty!" roared the financier, casting prudence to the winds.

The gentleman from Mumford's Mills threw up both hands and turned away.

"Neighbour," he said to Colonel Wixom, "you have got a pack of Wall Street sharpers on your hands. They don't know what they're bidding on any more'n a bob-tailed calf, and they don't care. Don't lose your head now, little gal," he added to Mopsie, "for I don't believe they've got the price of a pint of beans between them."

The bidding at the tree became more animated.

Fifty-five and sixty came in quick succession, then by tens it rose to seventy and eighty. Lawlor sprang upon the bench and waved a hand with two extended fingers. He knew—or thought he knew—where Mr. Stites would stop, and at every advance the boarder with a cough (and lands in Porto Rico) gave him an approving nod. He tried to catch the eye of Bullivant and enter into wireless negotiations, but the expert played his own game doggedly.

“Ninety!” he said.

“Ninety. Do I hear the hundred?” called the auctioneer, and Mr. Stites responded with a nod.

“One hundred thousand dollars for the river half of Heartbreak Hill!” announced Mr. Daniel Dunker. It was the supreme moment of his alpaca life, and the thrill of it lent resonance to his voice. The chestnut leaves hung motionless, the lilacs ceased to tremble foolishly, and to Mopsie it was as though some awful fate had spoken; as though she had been sold herself and was about to pass into the ownership of Mr. Stites.

“I think I’ve had enough,” growled Bullivant, and it was clear that he at least had reached his limit. But over Mr. Lawlor’s face there crept a look of cunning satisfaction.

“One hundred and one!” he piped, breaking his voice intentionally to a mild falsetto. “One

hundred and one for the little Hill of Discord with all rights and privileges thereto appertaining."

Stites shot one lightning glance toward Mop-sie in the open with the sunlight full upon her, and remembered that she had promised to listen to him after dinner. Though it seemed an extravagance, it was after all, he reasoned, but transferring valuable securities from one pocket to another.

"One hundred and fifty thousand dollars!"

"Take it!" cried Lawlor. "Take it and be damned to you, eh, what?"

This was an anti-climax for the auctioneer, but still a pleasant anti-climax, and by this time he had grown used to large, mouth-filling sums.

"One hundred and fifty thousand!" he repeated. "One hundred and fifty thousand, once, one hundred and fifty twice, one hundred and fifty for the last time! Going—going——"

"Stop!"

The front door had flown open and the form of Madame Triboulet had darted down the steps.

"Stop! Stop!" she cried. "You are a lot of cheats."

Behind her, clad in Colonel Wixom's most flowered dressing gown, the little naturalist shuffled in the Colonel's largest slippers.

"Bid! Bid!" she cried to Mopsie. "Bid for yourself a million dollars before it is too late."

"Yes, yes," said Mopsie, eagerly. "I will."

Stites the victorious made a sweeping bow.

"That is not necessary," he said. "I gladly waive my right."

But Mr. Daniel Dunker was not to be thus thwarted.

"Bought in by the owner for a MILLION DOLLARS," he announced, extracting from the unctuous sentence its last oily drop.

Madame, embracing Mopsie wildly, poured forth a lingual torrent, incoherent for the most part.

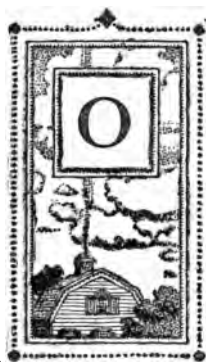
"Adolphe did not realise till this moment that the Hill was yours, my dear one," she explained. "That was a little lie about the root. He has in truth been employed in making secret investigations for a syndicate, and he knows your land is worth a fortune—ah, a hundred fortunes! Is it not true, Adolphe?"

"Oui, oui," said the Frenchman. "Yes, sure Mike. For I have seen him there myself, the wealth."

As no one had been listening to the warnings of the covered bridge, the apparition of Sidney Beatoun brought a fresh surprise.

"Hello! good folks," he said, "what's going on?"

CHAPTER XXI



NLY once before in all her life had Mopsie risen with the sun, and then—as it turned out—it was to disprove a fiction that salmon were to be caught in Roundabout at early dawn. It had been a chilly morning, as she recalled it, and so still that she could hear the ripple of the upper fall and the reveille of every bird in Heartbreak woods. Her lot had been to carry landing net and gaff while Sidney bore the heavier impedimenta, implements of his own devising which could have held a crocodile had there been one. But there had not been even a salmon, and when after hours and hours the expedition came home famishing to breakfast, Uncle Abner made so many jokes that Sidney lost his temper and refused a seventh flannel cake.

“I remember it all as though it were yesterday,” she declared, “and it must have been six years ago.”

Once again they were setting out together, but not alone, for Monsieur made a cheerful third,

and Bill—much gratified to find companionship at such an hour—an enthusiastic fourth. And years had brought them wisdom, for as they walked, Beatoun of Beatoun bit into a chicken leg, while Mopsie crunched brown bread over-spread with jam; fruits of Aunt Lydia's sacred ice-chest. The Frenchman was not eating, but there was a drop of milk on his moustache, and Bill was satisfied to keep his left eye which was pink upon the chicken bone. It was, taken altogether, a most promising expedition, made none the less so by the necessity of exchanging thought in French and English words released from the restraints of either grammar.

When the Frenchman had observed that morning was really the best part of the day Mopsie translated for his benefit a well-known proverb in which "Early to rise" rhymes admirably with "wise," but discovered that this was not the case in France. Then Sidney rashly ventured an announcement that "The bird who elevates himself all in the hour entraps the greens."

"Oh, but it should be 'ver,' not 'vert'!" corrected Mopsie.

"I was afraid of saying that the bird ate glass," explained her cousin, but the Frenchman, who had gathered vaguely that the bird composed verses, thought the idea charming.

"We call that little bird the alouette," he said.

"Oh, yes, the lark," said Mopsie. "But we don't have them here."

"Perfectly," said the naturalist, and after that they spoke of things less complicated.

At the covered bridge Bill, realising that they were actually bent upon a tramp, ran on ahead and took the Heartbreak turning as a matter of course.

"Are you quite sure that you feel equal to the climb, Monsieur?" Miss Beatoun asked, and Monsieur Adolphe dismissed her apprehensions with a shrug. The cold that had come from getting wet had left him, thanks to Aunt Lydia's remedies and the guardian saints, and Mopsie half suspected that the remedies were included for politeness' sake. His saints were of the sort that stand in placid rows on old French churches looking down on poor mortality, and reminding Heaven of the little human troubles that Omnipotence might otherwise forget; the sort that bring blind wanderers together when they can, and repay kindnesses a thousand fold.

"You, Mademoiselle, were a good friend of my Annette when she was alone and friendless. Now you shall see!"

"What shall we see?" demanded Sidney, standing still. "Come, Monsieur, let's clear up the mystery. Out with it! What are we to see?"

"What no one else has seen," replied the Frenchman. "Not the syndicate that sent me to investigate in secret, not this Bullivant who stole my box of specimens."

"Oh, hang it all!" cried Beatoun, losing patience. "I am not going any farther on a wild goose chase."

The Frenchman put his head on one side and threw up his shoulders.

"You would think me still more a wild goose," he said, "if I should tell you without my proofs. Believe me, Monsieur, I need both your eyes for witnesses."

"Oh, do let us hurry on!" cried Mopsie, following in the tracks of Bill.

Up, up the old trail once again they climbed, the Frenchman plodding on before as sturdily as ever little red-legged soldier trod the path to glory, following the Eagles.

"True or not," said Mopsie to her cousin, "he believes in it."

"It is not possible," retorted Sidney, holding back. "It's just a wild, wild dream."

"We'll see, we'll see," she answered, hurrying on into the morning mist.

The sun came out and Heartbreak Hill grew glorious suddenly. It touched the spider webs where dewdrops glistened, and the Field of the Cloth of Gold became a field of diamonds and

point lace. Diamonds were scattered everywhere, on silver birch leaves and the ruddy gold of fern and bracken. The cornflowers became amethysts, the wet moss clustered emerald and chrysoprase, the little red wet mushrooms rubies, garnets, carbuncles; the mist was like a golden cloud, the sun a golden ewer pouring down more gold on Mopsie's golden head.

"Come on, come on!" she urged and mounted higher, higher to where the little Frenchman waited with arms crossed upon his breast, the very likeness of his Emperor.

He did not stir a muscle till Sidney too came up, and then he raised one hand mysteriously.

"Now we shall see!" he said and led the way between the walls of Sidney's Robber Cave.

It was the passage that the foolish little Mopsie had declared must lead somewhere, and as of old the birch boughs closed above them, letting through a livid greenish light on tufted moss and fern. The fallen rock still blocked the way, and the place of Sidney's robber camp fires was as black as ever. There was no change visible anywhere about the Cave until the Frenchman, moving swiftly, lifted up and threw aside an armful of dry brush.

"Look!" he said, pointing downward.

What the cousins saw was a square excavation, two feet wide and two feet long and two

feet deep. The hole was absolutely empty. They could see the sides of it, composed of bits of broken stone and sprawls, and that the bottom was smooth and of a brownish colour. That was all.

“Look closer!” said the Frenchman, breathing hard. “Kneel down and look.”

The three knelt down in silence, confronting one another from three sides. But for the little man’s intense excitement the situation might have been absurd.

“Listen!” he said.

With a hammer produced from somewhere, he struck several blows upon the smooth brown surface, and inexperienced as the others were they recognised that the impact was not that of steel on stone. The sound was muffled, dull, unresonant, and where the hammer touched, a bright red spark appeared to spring to life and linger. Beyond all question what he struck was metal.

“Is it the cover of a chest?” gasped Mopsie, seeing visions of the Spanish Treasure.

Sidney grasped the hammer and began to pound.

“It is solid,” he declared.

“Yes, and it may go through to China,” said the Frenchman.

“To China?” Mopsie cried, leaving the

Treasure for the Subterranean Passage, which was even better. The climax had arrived and passed without her knowing it, and she believed the brown rock with its phenomena to be the evidence of something still to be developed.

Sidney worked on and Bill came panting from a rabbit hunt to fill the vacant side. The Frenchman's eyes were fixed upon the excavation, and his lungs expanded and contracted like a blacksmith's bellows.

"Was I not right? Was I not right?" he kept repeating.

"I am beginning to believe you were," said Sidney, from the hole into which he had now descended head and shoulders, and presently, heated and dishevelled, he knelt erect.

"Mopsie," he said, "I think it is true."

"What is true?" she asked. "I do not understand at all."

"Tell her. You found it," said the young man to the older.

"Mademoiselle," said Monsieur Adolphe, "it is true that you are the owner of one of the richest copper mines existing."

"Copper mines!" repeated Mopsie in dismay. "Why, what on earth am I to do with a copper mine?"

Sidney, springing up, held out a grimy hand to help her to her feet.

"I congratulate you, dear old girl," was all he said.

"No, Sidney," she protested. "Whatever this may be it does not belong to me alone, you know."

"Yes it does," he told her sternly. "This is your side of the Hill; we settled that in our agreement."

"We did nothing of the sort."

"Oh, but we did," retorted Sidney, "And, Mopsie, you are a rich girl now. Thousands—millions, maybe. Look at them staring at you from the ground."

He pointed to the excavation where the sparks of native copper shone like stars reflected in a turbid pool,—like the red eyes of demons pleading for release. The Frenchman stole out of the Cave on tiptoe.

"Sidney," she said, "they are in the ground, down, way down, out of sight, and there they shall remain until you take your share. Why, we have owned the Hill together ever since we were children."

"All that's changed now," he laughed.

"Nothing has changed a bit!" she cried. "I'm Mopsie, Mopsie Beatoun, just the same as ever."

"You won't be just the same as ever very long," he answered, and, filling his pipe mechan-

ically, he stood looking down into the hole as though it were another sort of excavation.

"Sidney," she said, "you have no right to treat me so. You have always bossed me and directed me, and now you cannot throw me off. You cannot be so cruel."

"Oh, you'll not lack advisers," he replied.

"But you can't really mean to refuse what is so truly yours?" she pleaded.

"Yes, I refuse to break our solemn compact, most assuredly."

"Would it have been the same if this was your side? Would you have taken everything yourself?"

He shifted on his feet uneasily, but only said: "That would have been entirely different."

Mopsie came around the hole and faced him, looking straight into his eyes.

"Sidney, will you marry me?" she said.

"Marry you, Mopsie?"

"Yes; why should you not? I'm not bad-looking, am I?"

He regarded her and shook his head.

"No, indeed. You are awfully pretty."

"And you don't hate me, do you?"

Again he shook his head, but made no other answer. She stiffened slightly.

"My proposal is a little unconventional perhaps," she began, forcing a laugh.

"You did not make one," he put in. "You were joking; trying to provoke me."

"You mean that you don't care for me?"

She drew back crimson, covered with confusion.

"No, Mops," he answered, "it is not that. But don't you understand that you are now far richer than the richest girl you ever knew. You will be a great heiress. You will be sought after——"

"Save me from that!" she begged. "Oh, Sidney, take me, hold me. Don't let me lose myself. Call me an idiot, kiss me, beat me, but don't let me go."

She was nearly falling on her knees before him, there in the Cave of Midas, with the red eyes of her millions blinking at her from their place of burial.

"Old girl," he said, "you are awfully upset, and I don't wonder that you should be. Come, let's go home."

"I'm not upset." She turned her back.

"Come on; it's damp here." He laid a hand upon her arm.

"Go away and leave me, please." She shook him off.

"Oh, no, indeed!" He took a firmer hold upon her and she followed meekly. Before they left the Cave she said:

"The next time that a girl proposes to you you should answer that you will always be a brother to her. It doesn't mean much, of course, but it might save her feelings."

Monsieur threw away his cigarette when he saw the cousins. He was more than ready now to answer questions; he invited them.

With shoulders, arms and fingers all at play he explained how the forces of Nature had co-operated during a hundred million years to collect a marriage portion for one latter-day human girl—whose bridegroom did not want her just because of it.

He related how, pretending to search for butterflies and eggs and herbs, he had recognised in the Cave of Midas traces of prehistoric miners, whose workings had been almost obliterated by the fallen rock. Mound builders they had been, most probably, who had had their little day of pride in their achievements. and beaten the strange docile metal into arrow heads and spears and bracelets. Art had been their ruin; left them decadent in the face of stronger peoples better skilled at murder and begetting; but this was only a conjecture based on generalities. Mopsie's opinion was that they had simply given up the mining for fear their friends would call them plutocrats and snobs.

Sidney advocated a theory that the falling rock

had crushed to death the solitary savage who possessed the secret. But if he hoped by this to provoke his cousin into a discussion of the claims of Jared to intelligent foresight, he did not succeed.

She did not speak to him directly, did not so much as look at him. Her one wish seemed to be to keep the Frenchman talking, constantly, and this task was never a hard one.

Monsieur's commission had been received, it seemed, through one of the gentlemen whose acquaintance had cost him penal servitude, a man of secrecy, skilled in underhand proceedings. There had been other expeditions to the Hill, examinations, scratchings, probings. Expert engineers had accompanied coasting parties. A metallurgist had sold Peleg Prout suspenders. Another with a barrel organ had partaken freely of Aunt Lydia's pies. Even the dancing bear had not been above suspicion. And it was evident that the source of Sammy Stites' instructions could easily be traced by any one who cared to take the trouble.

Not all of this came out that morning as the three went slowly down the Hill again, but enough of it to reveal a network of strategy, conspiracy and plotting. If the little Frenchman's part in it all had not been strictly honourable, his fault lay chiefly in betraying his associates

as soon as he discovered that the property belonged to Mopsie, Madame's friend; and this was not a serious misdeed as misdeeds go.

But a blight had fallen on the green of Heartbreak Hill as surely as if hungry locusts were beginning their attack.

"Let us stop here a moment, please," said Mopsie, when they reached the coasting sled where the double Beatoun was scrawled upon the wall surrounded by a foolish heart. There were no longer diamonds scattered on the Field of the Cloth of Gold, but here and there a dewdrop glistened tear-like in their memory, and the golden sun of morning had gone higher into clouds.

"It cannot be," cried Mopsie, passionately, sinking down upon the bench, while the two men stood to right and left of her. "I will not be responsible for it."

"Responsible for what, Mops?" asked her cousin.

"For all that is going to happen," she replied. "The fraud, the meanness and the ugliness. The hard labour of the men, the wretchedness of the women,—can't you see it all?" she said, pointing downward to the peaceful Beatoun fields. "Can't you see the miserable shanties huddled there? and the chimneys and the drinking places? and the dirt? Can't you hear the shout-

ing and the oaths? Don't you know that it must mean devastation and the death of everything that we have known and loved?"

"Ah," said the Frenchman. "I had better go ahead and tell them that you are following."

"No," said Miss Beatoun, springing to her feet, "we will all go on together."

The covered bridge gave back no echoes as they crossed in silence, but at the Wixom gate she said to Sidney:

"Indeed you must come in to breakfast. We are to have flannel cakes in memory of that other expedition."

Seeing that he hesitated, she added:

"You needn't be afraid of me."

"I am not, Mops," he replied, "but still I think I shall go home to breakfast."

"It must be tiresome to say 'No' so often," she said.

"Please, please don't, Mops!"

"Oh, dear, no. Never that again. Good-bye."

CHAPTER XXII



OPSIE in the carriage house discussed with Peleg subjects ranging from axle grease to matrimony. While he on his knees beside the buckboard applied the lubricant 'where it would best serve its purpose, she held the loosened wheel upright, by way—supposedly—of rendering assistance, and from time to time made efforts to coax Bill to pass in and out between the spokes after the manner of the circus. But Bill was much too wise a dog to learn new tricks.

"It looks so nice I'd like to touch it," Mopsie said, alluding to the saffron contents of the smooth round box.

"You wouldn't if you was a little nearer to it," answered Peleg, adding, "Funny, ain't it, how folks always wants to dabble in what they don't know anything about?"

Mopsie laughed because she had her own reasons for remaining in the carriage-house. With her wheel she might have been a figure of the

Fickle Goddess highly modernised, and Fortune must be smiling to assure herself a welcome.

Peleg was in a humour for philosophy.

"Now, take, for instance, matrimony," he went on, helping himself again to axle-grease. "When a feller's single he just naturally can't keep out of it."

"But isn't he often happier for being in?" Miss Beatoun urged.

"Maybe," Peleg admitted for the sake of argument, "but all the same he's liable to find out pretty quick that his wife ain't the woman he married. And for all I know," he added, "husbands ain't much different."

Mopsie turned her wheel as though she brought a sailing vessel up into the wind.

"You don't give either much encouragement," she said.

"Oh, yes, I do," retorted Peleg Prout, buttering the axle generously. "It's different when young folks has been brought up together, and understand each other's ways, and know how to quarrel and make up again without hard feeling being felt on either side, and has a lot of good old times to talk about. Then you can mark my words——"

Miss Beatoun's sail boat went about, fell off and caught the wind upon the other quarter.

"If there ever were two people just like that,"

she said, "one of them would be sure to be an obstinate, domineering bear."

"Maybe," admitted Peleg Prout. "I ain't a-sayin' young folks know what's good for 'em by any means."

There came a shadow in the open door, and following the shadow Sidney Beatoun.

"What are you doing here, Mops?" he asked.

"Helping Peleg, as you see," she answered, luffing.

Peleg scrambled to his feet and closed the appetising box.

"I guess I can manage to get along without you now if you want to go," he chuckled.

"But how about the other axle?" she protested.

"There never was but four of them," he answered, and when taking the helm from her grasp he had deftly clapped the wheel into its place, he breathed a sigh of satisfaction. "Well, that job's done and I can give my mind to something else."

"What is your opinion of the Heartbreak Copper Mine?" inquired Beatoun, who appeared to be in excellent spirits. He suffered Bill to bite the ferrule of his walking stick, and strode about the carriage-house as though it were a private view of buckets, whips and straps.

Peleg opened a chest and with great deliberation took from it a hammer and some nails.

"My opinion is," he said, "that there are enough gullibalooos in this world already."

"Oh, Peleg, what is a gullibaloo?" demanded Mopsie.

"A gullibaloo," explained Peleg Prout, "is a feller who believes everything he hears."

With that he departed with his hammer to a neighbouring shed, while Bill, who never wasted time, remembered an appointment in the cellar. Sidney continued to inspect the exhibition, and Miss Beatoun perched herself upon the tool-chest, hard by nature and rather high for comfort by design. From a row of pegs above her head hung scraps of disused harness in festoons, and occasionally her hat brim touched a string of sleigh bells which gave forth an aggravating jingle.

"Don't let us stay in here," protested Sidney.

"I must," she answered.

"Why?"

"Because."

Peleg began to hammer. Sidney sniffed.

"Who is closeted with your uncle?" he asked.

"A person I particularly do not wish to see."

"Who is it?"

The sleigh bells jangled out of tune.

"Mr. Stites."

"Well, what of it? Who's afraid of him? Come out."

"I won't," she said. "Do sit down on that nice little three-legged stool, but be careful of the sponge—it may be wet."

"Confound the sponge!" cried Sidney, giving stool and sponge a vicious kick, and when Miss Beatoun laughed the sleigh bells jingled merrily.

Peleg stopped hammering and began to saw, a slight improvement in conditions which enabled Sidney to hear his own voice sitting close beside her on the chest.

"I thought that we were through with Stites," he said. "What is he after now?"

"I think he wants to form a combination," Mopsie said. The bells made the faintest jingle imaginable. Peleg sawed.

"But you don't mean to let him, do you?"

"I don't know yet what I mean to do."

"What does your uncle say?"

"My uncle says I ought to travel about until I'm used to being rich, but I don't want to travel all my life."

"I should think not," he assented.

"I only hope," sighed Mopsie, "I shall not be rich enough to get all sorts of crazy letters and have my hitherto-unpublished picture in the Sunday papers. That would be dreadful."

"I'm afraid, old girl, that you are in for just that sort of thing," returned her cousin gloomily.

Peleg stopped sawing and began once more to hammer.

"Come out of this infernal boiler shop," commanded Sidney, springing to his feet, and as Mopsie in defiance tossed her head the bells came tumbling down behind her with a crash.

"Do please come out," he said again, and again her answer was "I won't." She had moved to the centre of the floor beside the yellow buck-board, and he stood before her. By the slamming of an outer door they knew that Peleg had gone.

"Just as you wish," said Sidney. "One place is as good as another for what I want to tell you."

"Is it anything very serious?" she asked.

"Yes; something very serious."

"I am listening, Sidney," was all she said.

"It is about yesterday," he went on. "You remember. In the cave."

"Yes, I remember very well," she answered, turning from him.

"I behaved like a brute."

"Yes, you did."

"I am very sorry."

"You ought to be."

"So sorry, Mopsie," he continued, "that I

would give anything I have to recall those foolish words."

"Then I forgive you," said his cousin, looking up with grave, soft eyes.

"Mopsie," he said, "you know that I could not have meant it. You know that I have always loved you; loved you more than all the world. You are the only thing that I have ever loved, and all my life I have meant to tell you some day, and ask you, dear, to be my wife."

"Yes, I have always known that you would ask me that some day," she replied, so low that he scarcely heard.

"Till yesterday," he put in bitterly.

"No," she rejoined, "since yesterday I have been surer than ever. I knew that you would let me be the one to answer 'No.'"

"But, Mopsie, Mopsie dear!" he cried, "you can't say no."

Mopsie nodded.

"Yes, I can. I never thought I should, but now I do. Sidney, I can never marry you."

"Why not?" he asked, the old familiar accent of authority coming back.

"Because," she said, "I could not make you happy. Because you have been the leader always. Even in little things you have not minded what I thought. That is what both of us are accustomed to. You want to do everything for

yourself, to win everything by your own effort; you want to go to Congress and be famous, and if you thought my money helped you, you would hate me."

"Nonsense, child, I could not hate you," he protested.

"Oh, yes, you would," she cried. "You are noble, Sidney, the noblest man I can imagine, but no man is noble enough to forgive his wife for being rich. Man's nature is to give, give, give, and only girls know how to take."

"But, Mopsie, you need some one to protect you——"

"No," she interrupted with a mirthless little smile, "that would be worse than marrying to keep the woodchucks in the family. Oh, Sidney," she broke out, "why could not you have drawn the fork?"

"Mopsie," he said, "be serious. You must have advice."

"Why should I?" she replied. "I am a Beaton just as much as you are, and if I must be rich I mean to be so in my own way. I am not going to leave my copper in the ground. I am going to let them take it out and sell it for me. But I shall see that everyone who works for me is treated fairly. Uncle Abner says that those who work and those who only think must help each other, and it need not be difficult because

there is never any doubt between what is honest and what is not."

"What are you planning? Utopia?" he asked, regarding her so tenderly that no one would have taken him to be her overlord.

"No," she said. "Nothing so imaginary; only a pleasant, healthy, pretty little town where all the children go to school and people can have fun when work is over; real fun, you know, not sterilised—like a Country Club where all the members pay a share. Aunt Lydia says it's certain to succeed if no one is expected to improve his mind."

"But, Mopsie, what about yourself?" he asked.

"I don't believe I shall have time to think about myself," she answered, and what he might have said farther must be guessed, for Bill the hunter brought their conversation to a sudden end.

"Oh, you wretch!" cried Mopsie. "What have you been doing?"

"Catching a rat," said Sidney, answering for the wretch, who had looked for commendation, and seemed dumfounded that his mistress should move into the sunlight so hurriedly. He winked his left eye which was pink at Beatoun, saying plainly, "Girls are girls, and we chaps have to make allowances."

The cousins did not speak until they reached the tennis court, and by that time Bill and his behaviour were forgotten.

"Sidney," she said, when she had made sure that no red car stood at the gate, "I hope you are not angry."

"No, Mopsie, not the least bit in the world."

"And you must not be at what I am going to say."

"That I promise."

"Well, I shall never use one penny more than my half of whatever comes from Heartbreak Hill."

"That's your affair, child," he rejoined.

They passed out through the gate, little heeding the direction but drawn unconsciously toward their Hill, and in the twilight of the bridge they came upon the red car drawn up close against the lattice truss. There was no one in the seat, but at the sound of their steps a head appeared from somewhere near the floor.

"You have discovered the coolest place here-about to-day," said Sidney in the hearty voice he had for every fellow creature.

"You're dead right there," came back as cheerily, but it was the big Van Buskirk boy, not the Porcupine, who spoke.

"So you have turned chauffeur," laughed Beaton.

"No," said the boy, "I'm only a teller. I watch while he takes a snooze under the bridge and tell him when he's wanted. I ain't obleeged to, but I do."

"That's very kind in you, I'm sure."

The boy crept out, not much the worse for oil, and grinned.

"There ain't a durned thing that I don't know about the old car now," he said, in confidence. "They can call it what they please, but they can't fool me. It's nothing but a steam engine." Being a Yankee boy he could not think of anything much simpler.

"And I suppose," suggested Mopsie, as the cousins turned to go upon their way, "that some day you will learn how to run a motor car."

"I only wisht I had a chance to show you what I can do now," replied the boy, returning to his valves.

They stopped half way along the bridge before the window looking out on Roundabout to feel a rush of cool air upon their cheeks, and see the mountain like a sunny picture in a sombre frame.

"Do you remember——" he began, and in the longest day he could not have enumerated the things that both remembered. For the past was marching by them like a gay procession in review, playing pipes and bearing banners, calling out to them forgotten trifles, and the dear

old stupid catch words that survive in memory longer than the churchyard dead.

"But we are not saying good-bye," said Mopsie as she wiped her foolish, wistful eyes. "We are going to see each other just the same as ever."

"Just the same as ever," he repeated. "If there can be nothing more, dear, I mean to cling all the more to what I have."

"Of course," she said, "and so shall I. Our lives will go right on without a change, and you'll write to me, won't you, when you go to Congress. You can tell me all about the tariff, and when I am in trouble I shall depend on you, and you shall call me a silly baby even when I'm an old, old woman."

"Likely enough," he reassured her, "unless," he added, turning suddenly from red to white, "there should be some day some one to object."

"There never will be anybody to object," she answered with a flush.

"Are you sure of that, dear?"

"Yes. How can you ask?"

"Forgive me, Mopsie," he replied. "Forget that, wipe it off the slate. That sort of thing is not in our breed. You have a glorious life before you, and I shall match it with as good a one. It was not obstinacy that made me speak as I did yesterday. It was not mere pigheadedness; it was simply that I could not take advan-

tage of your generosity. But to-day I saw that I had been a prig and I threw the responsibility on you."

"Yes," said his cousin, "and I understood. Oh, Sidney, always be a prig, and I shall always understand, and—and—" her voice sank to a whisper scarcely heard above the rush of Roundabout, "and I shall always love you. If our lives cannot be exactly one, dear, they can at least remain two undivided halves."

Their hands met for an instant, but no longer, for at any time the big Van Buskirk boy might creep out from beneath the car; and besides, there were two men approaching from the Heartbreak opening of the bridge. Lawlor and Mr. Bullivant, they proved to be.

The financier was in his most expansive mood and brimming over with good will toward all mankind.

"We've been taking another look at the Hill, and I mean to telegraph my brokers to sell copper short," he declared. "Biggest slump impending ever known. Heartbreak Hill discovery knocks market galley west—eh, what? Ask Bullivant. Oh, you've never been presented?—Miss Beatoun, let me have the pleasure of making known to you the Great and Only Bullivant, Late Expert to His Royal Highness Edward the Possessor."

Mopsie regarded Mr. Bullivant and Mr. Bullivant regarded Mopsie. The gentleman broke silence first.

"No doubt Miss Beatoun has forgotten," he observed, "an occasion when it was my privilege to hold her pony."

Miss Beatoun paused to make a mental measurement of Mr. Bullivant, another of her cousin Sidney, who overtopped the expert by three inches more or less, and a third of the dimensions of the window looking out on Roundabout. The latter she found rather large for absolute security.

"Yes, I remember how you held my pony very well," she said with a most gracious inclination of the head.

"Pity he was not among those present at the hold-up, eh, what?" said Mr. Lawlor, as the party, breaking into two, moved back toward the waiting car and visions of respective luncheons farther on. Beatoun, fearful lest their presence on the bridge might be mistaken for a tryst, lent a willing ear, apparently, to stories of Central Africa, while Mopsie did her best to follow in a general way what Mr. Lawlor had to say. It was to be thus with them forever now, never any more secrets, never anything the whole world might not hear; always the right of other people to break in upon them; always the things they did

not care about to separate them. As she saw Sidney now she was to see him often, often, interested in affairs in which she had no interest, squaring his broad shoulders in a battle that was not for her. And she would bear it no doubt as a Beatoun should.

Lawlor was asking her if she would need a private secretary for the letters with which she would soon be deluged. A lady somewhere near her own age would be the thing; one in whom were combined acumen and social tact. Fortunately he knew of such a treasure, and fortunately the treasure would be influenced by what he said.

"Fine girl!" he said. "Well off, but taken up the self-supporting fad in earnest. Plays on the typewriter like Paderewski and writes a business letter Milton couldn't beat. Send her down at once and let you look her over. Do no harm, eh, what? Her aunt Louisa would like to see her anyway."

"Then she is a relative of yours?" said Mopsie.

"Oh, yes, she is what I sometimes call a distant daughter. Rather good, eh, what? Louisa will present her formally."

"Why should you not do that yourself?" Miss Beatoun asked, and Mr. Lawlor answered with polite regret that he was to leave for Porto Rico

on the following day. She asked no further questions, but from his fatuous manner gathered that the game of Mountain Whist was doomed in Beatoun's Bridge.

At the opening of the bridge Sidney stood still to let the two men go ahead, old habit prompting him to keep his clan together.

"Good-bye," said Mopsie to the financier. "I hope that you will have good luck and happiness in Porto Rico, and I am sure Miss Lawlor and I will be friends."

She had planned a very rudimentary nod for Mr. Bullivant, but the expert was not to be so put off. Taking advantage of the moment Sidney was engaged in shaking hands with Mr. Lawlor, he came close to her.

"Will you accept a thank offering in memory of to-day?" he was beginning, when Mopsie interrupted him.

"Why not in memory of the day you held my horse?" she asked.

"No," he insisted, "in memory of to-day when you held something more unruly. In memory of a cad who tried to scare a country girl and met his match. My offering is the best that I can give: one that may save you many a thousand dollars. I'm not an expert in good manners, as you know, but I understand the mining business

through and through. Now let me explain that this copper vein of yours inclines——”

“Please explain to my cousin. I’d be sure to get it wrong,” she said, and laid a hand on Sidney’s arm.

“What is it, Mops?” he asked her, turning quickly. Mr. Lawlor, twisting his moustache, strolled away.

“Listen, please.”

The lion-hunter cleared his throat.

“I was about to inform Miss Beatoun,” he announced, speaking as one whose opinions have their value in the word-market, “that the point on Heartbreak Hill to begin developments should be near a certain shed——”

“The coasting shed,” cried Mopsie, interrupting.

“Possibly,” admitted Mr. Bullivant, “as there is no other building on the property.”

“I know the place,” said Sidney. “But why there?”

“Because a tunnel driven there should strike the vein within a hundred feet.”

“But the vein is on the very top,” protested Mopsie.

“The ‘out-crop’ is on the very top,” the expert corrected her. “From there the vein dips at forty-five degrees or thereabouts. The ore lies

toward the east.—We were all wrong; there is nothing on the river slope worth speaking of.—That is all I have to say. Good-bye, Miss Beaton, and may your fortunes be as golden as your other gifts.”

As Mr. Bullivant raised his hat and strode after Lawlor, Sidney said:

“You have evidently made a deep impression on the scientific gentleman, Mops. That’s the sort of advice that other people pay him well for.”

“Do you think he can be right?” she said.

“Of course; why should we doubt it?”

“But, Sidney, if he is?”

“If he is?—What then?”

Mopsie’s face grew radiant. Like a child she stepped back, pointing at him mocking fingers from the level of her laughing eyes.

“Then all the copper is on your side of Heartbreak Hill,” she sang, and never before had the covered bridge re-echoed such delight. It rippled all along the rafters, up and down again and in and out through beam and post and strut. It made the swallows twitter in their nests, and caused the big Van Buskirk boy to sit erect with mouth wide open.

“Oh, Sidney, what a joke on you!” she cried.

“What a heavenly, glorious, splendid joke on you.”

Though she knew that she was breaking tribal law in laughing at her overlord, the surety that never, never in his life could he retaliate emboldened her. But she could not then have guessed what speedy retribution she was calling down upon herself.

Sidney turned fiercely, not on her, but on the big Van Buskirk boy.

"Did you say that you could run that car?" he asked.

"Yes, Mr. Beatoun, I can run this car."

"Then break the record between here and Walton, do you hear?"

The voice of Beatoun was in Beatoun County as the voice of Jove.

"You bet your life I hear."

Mopsie has not yet arranged the sequence of events that followed in their proper order, and when she does so there may still be details missing. She is almost certain that a whirlwind caught her up, and placed her in the car beside her cousin, while the covered bridge flew over them. She thinks that Heartbreak Hill went soaring heavenward upon the left, while on the right the Beatoun meadows rose and came toward them like a runaway Atlantic. The whirr of wheels was in her ears, the pulse of overtaxed machinery, but she had no fear, no, not the least

bit in the world. And presently she saw the cross of Walton church against the sky.

"Where do you want to go?" inquired the Van Buskirk boy, looking around with flying hair and eyes that started from his head. "To the post office?"

Beatoun of Beatoun laughed.

"No, idiot," he answered. "To the rectory."



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